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THE NOTARY'S DAUGHTER

THE

NOTARY'S DAUGHTER

A Tale

FROM THE FRENCH OF

MADAME LÉONIE D'AULNEY

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON

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PREFACE TO

THE NOTARY'S DAUGHTER.

"THE NOTARY'S DAUGHTER" is partly a translation and partly an adaptation of a French tale, called *Un Mariage en Provence.* I felt a desire to *do it into English,* as our old-fashioned authors used to say, but only in case I could obtain leave to modify it according to my ideas and object in writing. This was a bold request to make to an authoress, and I had hardly a right to expect the ready and generous assent to it I received from Madame Léonie d'Aulney, for which I sincerely thank her. Several of the chapters are simply translated—others are my own writing. The idea of the plot is the same—the working out of it in many respects different. If the double authorship is not too apparent, I may hope the experiment has succeeded, and that I have not done too great an injustice to the work of a sister authoress.

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THE NOTARY'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

LA PINÉDE.

On the coast of the Mediterranean, between Marseilles and Toulon, a small harbour lies snugly ensconced in the rocks and protected from the wind by a stony projection shaped like a pier. In stormy weather vessels sometimes seek the shelter of this little haven, but at other times the only boats in it are those belonging to the fishermen of the town. The name of this little port is La Ciotat. It had never been heard of until the *Carlo Alberto* in 1831 landed the Duchesse de Berri on that point of the French coast, and at the time when this story begins its existence was as little known in France as if the quaint little city had been situated in the neighbourhood of Pernambuco or Batavia. In geographical dictionaries it was said to contain four thousand five hundred inhabitants, and the vintage of its hillocks was highly commended.

At the time we are speaking of, a carriage-road from Marseilles to La Ciotat was in course of construction. In spite of great efforts, the work proceeded slowly. Great obstacles arose from the nature of the soil. Engineers and miners found it difficult to deal with the rocks and precipices in their way; but there was no lack of zeal in overcoming nature's resistance, for the new road was to open communications with Marseilles—and for the inhabitants of La Ciotat, Marseilles was a sort of Paris. As to the real Paris, they knew its name, they talked of it, but never dreamed of going there; nor is it quite certain that they all did know of the existence of Paris in 1835. This is no exaggeration, for at that time many a poor peasant used to take off his hat as he passed before a picture of Louis Philippe, and called him *the good King Louis the Sixteenth.* The storm which convulsed the world from 1789 to 1794, and the glory which dazzled it from 1800 to 1815, had passed unperceived over the heads of these good people.

Now all is changed. A dockyard for steamers has been established at La Ciotat. The benefits and the evils of civilization have reached that remote corner of the world. The traveller's eye reads its name as he passes by one of the stations of the railway, and catches a glimpse of the picturesque little town and its busy port full of shipping.

At about a league and a half from La Ciotat, at the foot of a hill covered with dwarf pines, ilexes, and holly, stands a rock where the goatherds of the neighbourhood are wont to congregate, and which they call from its peculiar shape, "the Sugar-loaf." At the time in question, just opposite this rock two roads diverged in different directions. The new highroad leading to Marseilles made an angle and stretched its dusty length between the olive plains on each side of it, and the other road, or rather pathway, half choked up with furze and brambles and supported by dilapidated stonework, ascended the hill.

On a sunny morning in March a man was sitting on a stone ledge at the bottom of the Sugar-loaf rock. His dress and appearance were those of a thriving bourgeois—his figure short and stumpy, his complexion ruddy and brown. He looked between forty and fifty years of age. There was in his countenance a mixture—not an uncommon one in France—of good-nature and shrewdness: shrewdness of a common-place sort, with more sharpness in it than cleverness. There was a cunning look in the fat little gentleman's eyes; but his laugh was frank, which indicated that the cunning was assumed and the frankness natural. A man's character is more easily read in his manner of laughing than in any other way: what is false or affected in

it is too apparent to deceive. The name of this personage was M. Toussaint Lescalle. He was a solicitor, one of the two royal notaries established at La Ciotat. At the moment when we find M. Lescalle seated at the foot of the Sugar-loaf hill, he seemed to be expecting somebody. Now and then, shading his eyes with his hand, he glanced at the new road, as it was then called. The white pebbles sparkled like diamonds, the soil glowed like burnished gold, the olive trees glittered like quicksilver; but it was not the peculiarities of the landscape which occupied M. Lescalle. He beguiled his impatience by reading over a letter which he drew out of a huge portfolio on his knees, and then by looking every two or three minutes at his watch with manifest signs of impatience.

At last he got up, seized his portfolio and a bundle of keys which had been lying in his hat, and began to ascend the path up the hill. As he was slowly advancing, the sound of a horse's trot reached his ears, which made him suddenly stop and turn round, and then he saw a man on horseback approaching at full speed, upon which he retraced his steps.

"Upon my word, M. le Baron, I had given you up," he exclaimed, as the gentleman came up to him.

"No wonder, my good friend," was the reply; "but if I am late, I assure you I could not help it.

I have been spending two days with the Marquis de Prévis, and did not arrive at Marseilles till this morning."

"Will the Marquis lend a helping hand about the election?" the solicitor inquired.

"We had some conversation on the subject," the Baron said, in a way that showed he did not intend to disclose what had passed between him and the Marquis. M. Lescalle took the hint, and allowed the subject to drop.

Before the two men left the foot of the Sugar-loaf hill, the Baron dismounted and tied his horse to the trunk of an olive tree. Glancing at the stony and steep pathway, he said, "I am not going to run the risk of breaking my Silphide's legs up that horrid road."

The lawyer repressed a smile, for although the old mare might have once deserved that fanciful name, her actual aged condition and broken knees were not in keeping with it. There was a sort of resemblance between Silphide and her master. He too was old and thin and worn out; a small head, long limbs, and an aquiline nose, gave him a combined likeness to a racehorse and a greyhound. The Baron de Croixfonds had every right to this aristocratic appearance, for he was descended—so he always said, at least—from one of King Réné's brethren in arms during the wars between the

houses of Anjou and Aragon. His wealth was supposed to be greatly inferior to the antiquity of his family, but he had an elder brother who was a peer of France and very rich. His expectations, in consequence, were more brilliant than his means.

As they slowly ascended the hill, M. Lescalle was the first to speak. Assuming a somewhat consequential manner, he said, "I am rather afraid, M. le Baron, that this excursion of yours will prove a fruitless one."

"Why so?" the Baron asked.

"I mean that you will not be able to carry out your plans."

"Have they changed their minds about selling La Pinéde?"

"Oh dear, no; but there is another purchaser in the field."

"A *bona fide* one?"

"Yes, a *bona fide* one."

"How have you heard of it?"

"Read this letter. It is from M. Berthet of Marseilles."

The Baron glanced at the contents of the letter, and asked, "Who is this Comte de Védelles?"

"An ex-magistrate, I think. One of the old nobility of Lorraine."

"I wonder how high this new purchaser will bid."

"Considering the price at which we start the sale, there is ample scope for bidders," the solicitor observed, in a confidential tone.

"We shall see," the Baron replied. "That low price may have tempted this count. When he finds that a neighbouring landowner is in the field, he will withdraw."

"And you will purchase?"

"Well, my son Césaire's election must be secured, and to secure it we must possess La Pinéde. I must do all I can," and after a pause the Baron added, "and then my brother will help us."

"Oh, if the Vicomte de Croixfonds lends his assistance there will be no difficulty."

"I am glad in any case to see this mysterious place," the Baron said, without taking notice of M. Lescalle's remark. "It is an old fancy of mine, which I have never been able to gratify. Ever since my return to Croixfonds, fifteen years ago, I have wished to visit La Pinéde, but I never could get in. Have you always had possession of the keys?"

"I received the keys of the chateau sixteen years ago, when Count Honoré went away after the death of his wife, and I have never been there myself since that time. He had given me exact orders on the subject, and I adhered to them."

"And has nobody been into the house—nobody at all—for sixteen years?"

"Count Honoré, as long as he lived, spent a week there by himself every year."

"In what a wretched state it must be," the Baron said.

"I should think so indeed," M. Lescalle replied, and taking the largest of the keys which he carried in his hand, he thrust it into the rusty lock of an iron gate.

Above this gate was a medallion in the style of Louis the Fifteenth's time, on which the letters H. and P. formed a monogram, surmounted by a coronet. On each side of the gate a stone wall followed the undulations of the uneven ground and surrounded the whole summit of a tall hill, which seemed to rebel against this rigid belt by throwing out such an immense quantity of brambles and ivy that in several places breaches were opened in the wall. About sixty acres of barren, wild, uncultivated land, dotted about with clumps of firs—remnants of the old forest which had given its name to the place—were inclosed within its precincts, and in the centre of this property stood the house, respectfully called by every one in that neighbourhood the *Chateau de la Pinéde.*

Small as it was, something distinguished and old-fashioned in its appearance justified that appellation. It had been built in the reign of Louis the Thirteenth, partly of brick, partly of stone, and

formed a perfect square; irregular rows of windows on every side, and a single door studded with projecting iron nails, gave it very much the look of a gigantic dice.

Before the entrance-door was a broad paved terrace, bordered by a parapet, on which vases of blue china contained dried-up mould and sticks which had once been wreathed with green. Four acacias, planted at each corner of this terrace, had grown to a magnificent size. Their branches, freed from the trammels which used to compel them to form a sort of tent before the house, had taken all sorts of strange liberties. One of them had availed itself, in a free and easy manner, of the opening made by a broken pane of glass in one of the windows of the second story, and intruding into a bedroom, astonished every spring the spiders, its sole inhabitants, by a burst of green leaves, white blossoms, and delicious perfume. With the exception of this broken pane, everything in the little chateau was hermetically closed. Thick shutters protected the windows of the first story, and heavy iron bars those of the ground floor. If it had not been for that audacious branch of acacia and the grass growing amongst the stones of the pavement before the entrance-door, it might have been supposed that the inhabitants of La Pinéde had only left it a few days ago.

The grounds evinced the contrary even more than the house. The dried-up soil, covered with branches and bindweed, presented the most desolate appearance. A fine avenue of olive trees, which led from the gate to the terrace, some few peach and almond trees and straggling vines, which made it their business to strangle the fruit trees in their entangled knots, alone testified that the place had been formerly cared for. The soil of Provence is unproductive when left to itself. To make it fertile, two things are required—labour and water. For sixteen years La Pinéde had been left without the beneficial ministrations of spade or watering-pot.

The scene above described met the eyes of M. Lescalle and the Baron de Croixfonds when, after having with difficulty pushed open the iron gate, the hinges of which refused to perform their part, they walked up the avenue, arrived in front of the Chateau de la Pinéde, and by means of another of M. Lescalle's heavy bunch of keys, entered the house and found themselves in a large hall paved with marble, which emitted that peculiar odour of dust and decay which housekeepers call a close smell. M. Lescalle rushed into the adjoining saloon and threw open the windows. The gladsome morning sunshine flooded suddenly with light the long-closed room, and the two men looked at each other in silent astonishment. The principal pieces of

furniture were grouped round the chimney, in which half-burnt logs of wood seemed to be waiting for the fire-tongs to rekindle them.

On one of those low couches which used to be called *Causeuses*, some tapestry work with a needle hanging to it, and an unfolded pocket-handkerchief, were lying. A child's table standing near this sofa was covered with little white sheep wearing pink collars and fraternizing with lions, wolves, elephants, and stags, of proportionate size. Shepherdesses in blue gowns and hunters in red coats, resting at the bottom of a large box of playthings, seemed destined to join that happy family. The box was lying open on the couch by the side of the piece of work. It was impossible to mistake the mother's place and the child's place in that room. Her work and its play seemed only just interrupted. Where was the mother? Was she not about to come in? Where was the child? Would not the sound of its laughing voice soon ring joyfully on the stairs? No; all was silent as the grave.

The two men looked at each other with that sort of sadness which is sometimes felt at the sight of an empty nest. An old lawyer, and an old man of the world! There must have been a strange pathos in that room to have thus affected them.

On the corner of the chimney was lying a dried-up nosegay of violets, which the first touch would

have destroyed, and an old newspaper. The Baron de Croixfonds took it up and read the date—March 7th, 1819.

"Yes; the eve of the anniversary of the poor Countess de la Pinéde's death," the notary observed.

"Come, Lescalle, give me some account of it," the Baron said, resuming his usual manner. "You keep your reminiscences as closely under lock and key as the domain of La Pinéde."

"I had made a promise on the subject," M. Lescalle answered; "but now unfortunately there is no reason why I should keep it."

"Well, then, let us break the seal at once," the Baron said. "I like family histories, and I suppose, as there was so much secrecy observed in this case, that this one must have some peculiar interest." As he said this, the Baron stretched himself at full length on the sofa, took out his cigar-case, and assumed a listening attitude.

"If you expect some complicated or extraordinary history, your curiosity will be disappointed," M. Lescalle answered. "The state in which you find this place—and this room, in which everything tells its tale—reveals the simple fact that death snapped the thread of a young woman's existence, and doomed the life which was bound up in hers to a hopeless sorrow."

"I know the fact, but I want to hear details."

"You know, I suppose, that the La Pinédes were one of the oldest families in this part of the country, and that they built this little chateau in the midst of this pine forest when Les Trois Tours, their former abode, had fallen into decay?"

"Yes, I have heard all that ancient history. But what was their position in more recent times?"

"They did not go often to Paris, or to Court, but were always very popular in their own neighbourhood, so much so, that they remained here quite unmolested through the whole of the revolutionary period. The Court party, after the restoration, never forgave their not having emigrated."

The Baron, whose family had emigrated, looked displeased, and said, "I do not care for political details, my dear Lescalle. Let me hear their domestic history."

"Their private history, M. le Baron, was closely connected with what I have just told you as briefly as I could, for it accounts for the fact that Count Honoré de la Pinéde concentrated his existence in the narrow circle of his domestic affections and his secluded home. One so young, so wealthy, so handsome, and so clever, would certainly have played a part in the world, if his principles during the Empire, and afterwards a sensitive pride resulting from the circumstances I have alluded to, had not kept him aloof from social and political life.

He knew the Bourbons were not favourably inclined towards him, and though his sympathies were Royalist, he would not condescend to curry favour with them, so he lived entirely in the country, and cared for nothing but his wife and his home."

"Whom did he marry?"

"His cousin, Mdlle. de la Pinéde. They had both lost their parents in early life, and had been brought up by an old childless uncle. From the time of their babyhood they had cared for each other, and cared for hardly any one else besides. It was one of those engrossing affections which seemed to supply to them both the place of all other ties. People used to say that these children realized the story of Paul and Virginia, only in their case it ended in a marriage. When Count Honoré was twenty he married Mdlle. Louise, who was eighteen. They had one child, a girl, and for six years their happiness knew no bounds: La Pinéde seemed an earthly paradise. But in one day, in one moment, it came to an end. Madame de la Pinéde died suddenly of disease of the heart. Beautiful, happy, smiling, sitting by her husband, who perfectly adored her, and her little child playing at her feet, she expired!"

Excited by the recollection of the most pathetic incident in his life, M. Lescalle's words seemed

scarcely in keeping with the usual light and somewhat cynical tone of his conversation.

He paused a moment, and then pointing to the sofa, said: "I see it all before my eyes as I saw it then. Her lovely face, white as a sheet and sinking on her bosom, her hand on the head of her child. Count Honoré on his knees, trying in vain to make her smell salts, and looking at her with eyes which seemed to grow wild with terror and despair."

"How did you happen to witness this scene?" the Baron asked.

"I arrived here at the very moment it took place, having called to talk over matters of business with the Count. As I opened the door of this room, I saw what I have been describing, and knew at once that there was no hope—that all was over. I dragged the poor man out of the room. He seemed to have lost his senses, and for several weeks his friends were afraid he would quite go out of his mind. They urged him to leave the place, and at last, for the sake of his child, he consented to go away. But before his departure he dismissed all his servants, even the gardener, and locked up the house and the gates of the park. Then he sent for me, gave the keys into my keeping, and exacted a solemn promise that I would never use them—never go myself, or let anybody

else go to La Pinéde. It was a morbid fancy of his that the place where his wife had been born, had lived, loved, and died, should remain as a solitary monument to her memory, the tomb of his past happiness, an emblem of utter desolation and perpetual mourning. I promised to attend to his directions. After shaking hands with me, he drove away with his child and her nurse. For the sake of Mdlle. Denise's education, the Count took up his abode in Paris. For the last fifteen years he has always spent one week in March at La Pinéde. For eight days shut up in solitude, for even then he would not admit any one into the place, he wandered like a ghost about the house and grounds. People about here think he was out of his mind, and lament that this ancient family should have ended so sadly. The last time he came he looked deplorably ill, and spoke of his failing health. I tried to cheer him up, and advised him to try some waters. He smiled in a mournful manner, and said, 'My good friend, the wound has never healed. It is not waters that can cure a broken heart. Do not look at me so sadly. Fifteen years ago I was indeed to be pitied; but now God has been good to me, and my release is at hand. I am happier than I have been for a long time past. My sufferings will soon be over.' I was horrified at his talking in that way.

"'But, Mdlle. Denise,' I said, 'you ought to wish to live for her sake.'

"'Ah! my little girl!' he answered with some emotion. 'God will take care of Denise.'

"God, you see, was so much in his thoughts, M. le Baron; I felt that was a bad sign, and though I said all I could to make him more cheerful, I made sure he would die soon, and so it turned out. Three months afterwards I received the news of his death, and then Mdlle. de la Pinéde, by the advice of her guardian, M. Legrand, made up her mind to sell this place. He has never been to see it, this fine Paris gentleman, and he does not know that its value has considerably increased since the new road to Marseilles has been made. I painted in somewhat high colours the deplorable state into which Count Honoré's morbid fancy has allowed the property to fall, and so we arrived at a valuation which has placed it within reach of your son's means."

"In case we have no serious competitors," the Baron replied; "but that M. de——. How do you call him?"

"M. de Védelles."

"Well, that M. de Védelles, who falls upon us from the skies, is a great bore."

"I did my best. The sale has scarcely been advertised at all at Marseilles—only for the last

eight days, so that there has been hardly time for any one to know of it—but this purchaser writes from Paris."

"And how on earth did he hear of it there?" the Baron exclaimed.

"Oh, in a very simple manner! Mdlle. de la Pinéde has been educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and the Countess de Védelles visits the ladies there, and made acquaintance with the heiress, and they have laid their heads together on the subject. It was impossible to foresee this."

"It is the devil to pay!" the Baron cried. "If they bid more than two hundred thousand francs, we shall have to give it up. Even with my brother's assistance, and by getting into debt, we cannot go beyond that price."

"It is a great pity," the solicitor said.

There was rather a long pause, and then in a hesitating manner he added, "There might perhaps be a way in which the matter could be arranged."

"What way?"

"Under certain circumstances it would be in my power to place fifty thousand francs at M. Césaire's disposal."

"Could you really, Lescalle?" the Baron anxiously inquired.

"But then you see, M. le Baron," the solicitor replied, speaking slowly and laying an emphasis

on the words, "you see that sum constitutes a considerable portion of my daughter's fortune, and Rose is growing up."

"Oh! it is your daughter's fortune you are speaking of. Then in that case——." The Baron did not finish his sentence; but there was a look in his face which meant, "We need not say anything more about it."

"Can you reckon on your electors?" M. Lescalle asked.

"Yes, I think so. I have no anxiety on that point."

"If we come to an agreement, I might secure you a certain number of votes."

"Oh! pray do so. We cannot afford to neglect any chance."

"It would be rather a serious thing for me, however," the lawyer answered. "You see I cannot throw over the party which supports Richer de Montlouis, unless I had a good reason for it."

"Always on Mdlle. Rose's account?" the Baron asked, in a slightly satirical tone.

"Yes, M. le Baron, I am quite above-board with you. I do not mind showing you the cards. Artémon Richer——"

"De Montlouis," the Baron sneeringly added.

"Artémon Richer seems inclined to pay his addresses to Rose, and, upon my word, he is so

good a match that I am not inclined to put a spoke in the wheel by quarrelling with his family and opposing the election of his uncle."

"You don't mean to say that you would give your daughter to that heavy dolt of a man, who is always lounging in the Estaminets?"

"Not if I could find a better match for her," the solicitor answered; "but——"

The Baron snatched up his hat, and walked out of the house into the avenue. He was determined not to look as if he understood. M. Lescalle dropped the subject, and the two gentlemen walked about the place calculating the worth of each acre of land, and exulting over the neglect in which everything was left, which certainly did seem likely to disgust any one who should visit it before purchasing.

When this sort of approximate valuation was concluded, they went back to the place where Silphide was leisurely grazing at the foot of the Sugar-loaf hill. The Baron mounted his steed, and turned its head towards Croixfonds. The solicitor walked by his side for a few minutes, talking over some of the details connected with La Pinéde, and then somewhat abruptly said, "I am very much afraid that M. Césaire will not be elected."

Without giving the Baron time to answer, he bowed and left him, and as he hastened home with the fear of Madame Lescalle before his eyes, who

could not bear to be kept waiting for breakfast, the little man murmured between his teeth, "That old aristocrat. I hope he understands that I can spoil his game."

M. de Croixfond mean while was making the following mental ejaculations: "The presumption of these low-born people is becoming quite intolerable. To think of this vulgar attorney's venturing to offer me his daughter for my son! And now I suppose he will turn against us! But somehow or other Césaire must be elected." His pride and his ambition pulling in different directions, the descendant of King Réné's friend went home in a very bad humour.

Three weeks afterwards the Comte de Védelles became the owner of La Pinéde. A bid of twenty thousand francs beyond the sum the Baron could produce, settled the matter. When M. de Croixfond was informed of this result, he felt almost sorry that he had so decidedly snubbed M. Lescalle's proposal, for unless his son could purchase a property in that part of the country he would not be eligible, and, as M. Lescalle took care to point out, this was not an easy thing in an old-fashioned locality where estates did not often change hands. The Baron knew perfectly well that such was the case: to remind him of it was like handling a smarting wound. It was with difficulty that he concealed his vexation.

CHAPTER II.

THE DE VÉDELLES.

THE Comte de Védelles and his family arrived at La Pinéde at the end of April, just at that moment so delightful in Provence, when the full burst of a southern spring adorns the whole landscape with a profusion of flowers. The blossoms of the peach and almond trees clothe the country in pink and white. The yellow stock, the purple iris, the blue salvia, the red valerian, and the wild vine cover every hill with a rich mantle of gorgeous colours, fringe every wall with bright tufts of waving beauty, and embalm the air with an indescribable perfume. The days were mild and lovely, but the evenings sometimes very cold—thanks to the mistral, that terrible bane of the Provençal climate.

One night that this rough enemy was blowing with virulence and had prevented the usual stroll after an early dinner, three of the new inhabitants of La Pinéde were sitting round the chimney, where some pine-logs and burning cones were diffusing their fragrant perfume and not unwelcome

heat. These three persons were the Count and Countess de Védelles and their eldest son, Jacques de Védelles. The Count was reading in a huge arm-chair, the Countess working at a piece of tapestry, Jacques, half-sitting, half-lying on a couch near his mother, poked the fire and watched the sparks as they flew up the chimney with an absent expression of countenance which betokened either an idle or a dreamy state of mind, which is by no means the same thing.

For some time no one spoke. The great buhl clock ticked, the logs crackled, the wind made strange noises amongst the pine trees.

At last Madame de Védelles dropped a ball of worsted, and as her son stooped to pick it up she whispered to him, "Is George still out of doors?"

"I suppose so," Jacques answered in the same low voice. Madame de Védelles sighed, and another long silence ensued.

Though she had not meant her question to be heard, it had apparently caught her husband's ear, for he rang the bell, and soon the wrinkled face and grey head of old Vincent appeared at the door.

"Is M. George at home?" the Count asked, without raising his eyes from his book.

"M. George is finishing his supper in the little dining-room. He has made a very good meal of it," the old man added in a significant manner,

and almost before he had finished his sentence, George de Védelles came into the room.

Though he was twenty, his figure was so slight and his appearance so youthful that he did not look more than seventeen or eighteen years of age. The perfect symmetry of his features and the whiteness of his face gave it the appearance of a marble bust. It was only in his eyes that there was any animation. They were dark, sparkling, and yet soft; their dreamy, absent expression added to the peculiarity of this young man's countenance.

George's dress, unlike that of the rest of the family, betokened neglect. He had on that evening a shooting-jacket and trousers much the worse for wear, heavy leathern gaiters, and thick, clumsy shoes. Had it not been for the fineness of his linen, and his white and well-shaped hands, he might have been taken for a young gamekeeper.

After he had made a bow to his father and kissed his mother's hand, he sat down on the couch near his brother. As he did so and turned towards him, a bright smile lighted up his face, but only for a minute.

"What have you been doing, George?" the Count asked. "Why did you not come home in time for dinner?"

"I have been out shooting all day," was the

answer; "and it was later than I thought when I came back."

"We may conclude, then, that you have brought home plenty of game."

"The season is very bad, and game, I fancy, scarce in this neighbourhood."

"Then why are you always going out shooting? What an absurd fancy it is to be walking about all day with a gun on your shoulder without object or result." George made no answer, and played with the ears of a fine spaniel which had followed him into the room. M. de Védelles went on. "It was just the same at Valsec, where there was plenty of game of every sort. You do not choose to exert yourself even as to idle sports. You never make an effort even for the sake of amusement. You will always remain a listless, unsociable, obstinate dreamer."

"But my excursions amuse me," George replied, "even though I do not shoot much, and I think they are good for my health."

"Health, always health!" the Count exclaimed; "that is the excuse for everything. I am getting tired of it."

"But, my dear, if these long walks strengthen him," Madame de Védelles said.

"He seems strong enough now," the Count rejoined. "It would be well to think of the

improvement of his mind. Come, George," he added in a kinder manner, "can't you resume a little your course of studies? Jacques would direct and help you."

"Pray do not talk of that, my dear father. I cannot work my head. I tried to look into the books Jacques lent me, but I could make nothing of them."

"Don't you understand what you read?" Madame de Védelles asked.

"Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't, mother. But I hate study; it tries my head."

"Astronomy is, perhaps, your favourite pursuit," M. de Védelles sneeringly remarked. "I saw you yesterday walking up and down the avenue, with your nose in the air, star-gazing, I presume."

"Oh yes; I like to look at the sky: it is so wonderfully beautiful."

"Then I hope your memory is returning. Do you find that you recollect the names of the constellations? If I remember right, you had at College the first prize for cosmography."

"Oh! that was before my illness, father, and I have forgotten the names they gave to my dear beautiful stars. Now I can only look at them and feel glad that God made them."

M. de Védelles looked disappointed and sighed.

His wife, who wished to interrupt the conversation, turned to her eldest son and said, "Dear Jacques, will you read us something aloud?"

"Yes, mother. What shall I read? I have got here *Valentine*, a novel of Georges Sand's, and *Sous les Tilleuls*, by Alphonse Karr."

"Novels," Madame de Védelles said. "What sort of novels are they?"

"An amusing sort, I suppose," Jacques answered, "for they are very popular, and people do not generally care for tiresome books."

"But are they good books to read?" Madame de Védelles again inquired.

"You need not take the trouble to ask," her husband said; "the names of the authors are enough."

"I know nothing about them."

"Well, I will tell you what they are," the old Count rejoined. "They are writers who seek for subjects of interest amidst the foulest scenes of human depravity and exhibit the worst passions of human nature under the fairest and most deceitful garb. M. Karr and Madame Sand hold a high rank in this intellectual orgy, which would end by utterly dishonouring literature in France, if, like all other orgies, it was not doomed to be short-lived and to die of its own excesses."

"You are very severe, father, on these poor

authors," Jacques said. "If they had appeared before you when you sat on the bench, they would have found no mercy at your hands."

"I should have made short work with them," the old Count answered; and then turning to his wife he said, "I suppose you do not wish Jacques to read to us such books as those, my dear?"

"No, indeed," she replied. "Can you suggest anything we should like to hear?"

"Why not one of the *chef-d'œuvres* of our old literature?" the Count said, taking up from the table a volume of Voltaire's tragedies.

Be it remarked that the old man, who had so justly and vehemently denounced the immoral writers of his day, shared that unaccountable partiality for the wickedest, the meanest, and the most unpatriotic Frenchman of the last century, which lingers still in the minds of so many of his compatriots, even in those who, to a certain degree, have struggled out of the mists of cynical unbelief with which he has poisoned the souls of successive generations. M. de Védelles was of the number of those who had imbibed from the teaching of the eighteenth century a practical scepticism, if the two words can be united, which, though not obtrusively put forward, nevertheless influenced his thoughts and actions in various respects. He was a Royalist, a Conservative, and the husband of a pious woman.

For all these reasons he always spoke of religion with respect, and he abhorred modern infidelity and lawlessness. But his secret sympathy with Voltaire and his school sometimes pierced through his political and domestic code of religious propriety, and Jacques de Védelles, in spite of his mother's efforts, had derived from his father opinions which he more boldly announced and acted upon more consistently when not under the paternal roof.

Though a general admiration for Voltaire was amongst the half-involuntary influences which the Count had exercised over the mind of his son, the proposal to read aloud *Mérope* did not particularly charm him. He made, however, no difficulty on the subject, and drawing a chair close to the table where his mother was working, he began to read that somewhat dull but fine tragedy.

Jacques was gifted with a melodious voice and a great talent for reading. His father listened to him with delight, and his mother as if she was hearing the most exquisite music. George, before the end of the first act, was fast asleep. The Count de Védelles kept glancing at the couch in a contemptuous manner. At ten o'clock every one rose and went to bed. Passing before his slumbering son, M. de Védelles said to his wife, "And you try to make me believe that he has a taste for poetry?"

"The poor child is tired," she said; "look how pale he is."

"Oh, I know that you can always find excuses for him; but really he cannot go on leading this kind of life. Only see in what a way he is dressed: those dirty shoes and worn-out clothes make him look like a poacher just escaped from the hands of the gendarmes."

"I will speak to him about it to-morrow," Madame de Védelles gently said.

During this conversation Jacques had roused his brother, and was whispering to him something he did not seem to understand.

On the first floor of the chateau there was a square ante-room, with four doors opening into different apartments. After the Count and Countess had gone into their rooms, Jacques stopped his brother, who was going up the staircase to the next storey, and said:

"You really must attend, George, to our father's wishes. He gets quite angry with you. You ought to have more sense."

"What sense?" George asked, having heard only the last word of his brother's sentence.

"The sense to behave like other people."

"I do not see what harm I do to anybody."

"That is not the question. It is your duty to obey your parents; and your way of going on,

though it may not do them harm, displeases your father. Do try, George, to acquire the habits of a gentleman. You are now twenty, and after all you are the Baron de Védelles."

"Oh dear, yes, I know that very well," George answered. "Come, Jacques, please do not preach to me. You used not to do so, but now everybody tries his hand at it; even old Vincent, whilst I was at supper, kept grumbling away about something or other, I don't know what, for I was not listening. Really, people might leave me alone."

"Poor fellow!" Jacques said to himself, "it is impossible to make an impression upon him. We must be indulgent to his infirmities."

And there the conversation ended. The brothers shook hands; Jacques went into his handsome, well-furnished bedroom on the first floor, and George to a sort of large lumber-room upstairs, which he had made choice of as his sleeping-chamber, after obtaining leave from his mother to arrange it as he pleased.

One of his fancies had been to divide and subdivide this room by means of curtains hanging on rods, made with the pieces of tapestry which used to cover the walls of the rooms below before the house had been refurnished and silk substituted in their place. These ancient hangings represented a variety of scriptural, historical, mythological, hunting,

and pastoral scenes. Though faded and worn out, they were still very handsome even when seen by daylight; and in the evening, in the faint vacillating light afforded by a single candle, they seemed to assume all sorts of strange, fantastic shapes—white plumes nodded on the helmets of the knights; horses advanced against a wild boar standing at bay surrounded by a pack of hounds; Abraham's sword seemed to descend towards the form of his son bound to the altar of sacrifice; knights, hunters, and patriarchs looked as if they were carrying on mysterious interviews; and a crowd of scriptural and legendary personages rose from the canvas like figures in a dream.

George evidently took pleasure in living amongst these shadowy apparitions, for he often went up to his room before bed-time, and his mother had sometimes found him in a fit of abstraction, silently gazing on the face of Rebecca at the well, or the holy Queen Bertha.

There was nothing in that room which deserved to be called furniture, except a bed, a dressing-table, and a few chairs. In one corner stood an old lacquered harpsichord, which had once made the happiness of some ancestress of the Pinédes, but had been consigned to oblivion for many a long year. George had ruthlessly torn out of it the remaining strings, and turned the case into a

receptacle for shells, and pebbles, and dried flowers. Planks, supported by tressels, and covered with shreds of tapestry, did duty for a table, on which heaps of books were lying in hopeless confusion. Old Vincent had vainly asked leave to sort and arrange them. It was just over this disorderly library that the branch of acacia from the terrace extended its green foliage and white flowers. George would not allow it to be cut off or meddled with. He said it was the nicest piece of furniture in his room. An old easel, a fiddle, and two or three boxes containing unfinished sketches, and all sorts of odds and ends, completed the singular medley of things which filled this strange bed-chamber.

About an hour after he had gone to his room, but not to bed, and when the lights in the chateau were all put out, George de Védelles softly opened his door and went downstairs. He stood an instant on the landing-place of the first floor, and listened to ascertain that no one was stirring. All was quiet, and he went on, first to feel for his shooting jacket, which he had left on the couch of the dining-room, and having found it, crossed the vestibule and let himself out by the front door, which he carefully locked. Once in the avenue he ran on towards the gate, opened it in the same noiseless manner, and then dashed down a little path which led through the olive woods to the sea.

CHAPTER III.

VISITORS.

On the following day the weather was beautiful. A mild shower in the night had softened the air, the short-lived violence of the mistral had not too roughly shaken the clouds of snowy blossoms, and the sun was forcing open the orange buds. Bursting on every side they filled the air with perfume. Everywhere the gardeners hastened to disengage the trees from the straw clothing which protects them during the cold weather. Spring had gained the victory, and was triumphing over winter.

The Count's family were sitting at breakfast. As a rule silence prevailed during that meal. He read the Paris newspapers; George, who was sitting opposite the window, eat heartily and stared at the flowerbeds; Madame de Védelles now and then said a few words to Jacques who was sitting near her, and consulted him about points relating to the furnishing of La Pinéde. A difference of opinion arose on the subject of the relative merits of dimity and chintz. Jacques advised chintz for

the chair-covers in the drawing-room. Madame de Védelles, faithful to the traditions of the Restoration, inclined to dimity.

The Count was appealed to and also voted for dimity: the Countess thus remaining mistress of the field, told Jacques, to comfort him, that she meant to put chintz in his room.

"Oh, it is not worth while to do that, dear mother," he answered.

"What! sit on Utrecht velvet all the summer, Jacques," she answered, "and in Provence too, I cannot think of such a thing!"

"That is not what I meant," he replied, "but as I shall not be here more than a few days, it really would be useless to go to that expense."

Madame de Védelles' countenance fell. "I did not know you were going away," she said.

"Has not my father told you?"

"No."

"I meant to speak to you about it this very day, my dear," the Count said, looking up from his newspaper. "Jacques is anxious to go back to Paris, and I think he is quite right. He is losing time here, and time is precious."

"I suppose he is bored here," Madame de Védelles said, scarcely able to suppress her tears.

"Oh, you must not say that, dear little mother,"

Jacques exclaimed, as he affectionately kissed her hand.

"And if he was bored here," the Count rejoined, "if this sort of idle life in the country did not suit him, I should not blame him in the least. It is a proper sort of life for an old man of my age who wants rest and solitude. But at Jacques' age, a man must think of the future, and devote himself to his profession. Jacques has abilities which will secure success in any line he follows. He has studied for the Bar. He has a decided talent for speaking, but it is not by walking about a park that he will acquire reputation, or by living at home that he will prepare for himself future electors."

"But, my dear, the election which they are so excited about here will take place very shortly!"

"I am not talking of municipal elections. I mean the approaching general elections, where I hope to see Jacques cut a considerable figure. But for that end it is necessary to take measures beforehand, and to acquire a well-known name; that once secured, all the rest will easily follow."

"Do you really think so," Madame de Védelles exclaimed, quite electrified at the prospect. "George! only think if your brother was to be, one day, a Deputy! Would not that be a great honour?"

"A great honour indeed, mother," George replied, helping himself meanwhile to some more chicken.

"Are you appealing to George on the subject?" the Count bitterly asked. "Do you suppose he has any ambition for his brother? Would he had a spark of it for himself!"

George took no notice of his father's sneering remark, and breakfast ended in silence.

As Madame de Védelles rose from table, she looked out of the window and saw three persons walking up the avenue. "Here is company," she said. "Jacques, can you make out who they are? I do not feel as if I had ever seen these people before."

Jacques looked and answered: "It is M. Toussaint Lescalle, mother, with his wife and daughter."

"Yes, it must be Lescalle," the Count said. "I sent for him about some business matters, but I wonder why he brings his family here. Does he suppose that we are to be on a footing of intimacy with them?"

As soon as his mother uttered the word company, George had disappeared. In the mean time the visitors had been shown into the vestibule. Madame de Védelles came there and civilly greeted them. The notary said that his wife had hastened to pay her respects to Madame la Comtesse, and

had not been able to resist the wish to present her daughter to her.

Though Madame de Védelles was not a little bored with this visit, she answered in a gracious manner, and when the Count went into his study with M. Lescalle, she led the two ladies into the garden.

Madame Lescalle, like many of the inhabitants of provincial towns, was a person who took immense pains to disfigure, by affectation, her natural good qualities. Born at La Ciotat, she had left it only twice in her life, both times to spend a week at Lyons with an aunt of hers. These northern journeys, as she used to call them, gave her an assumed right to lay down the law on points of fashion and taste. She was in the habit of pronouncing in the most positive manner that some particular stuff was out of fashion, that such a style of dress was antiquated, that such and such a colour was in bad taste. No one ever ventured to differ from her. Privileges founded on assumption are singularly solid, and Madame Lescalle had long been the uncontested oracle of all the fine ladies of La Ciotat. Her decisions were undisputed, even by the wife of the mayor, the first dignitary of the town, and were listened to with deference in the house of the Richers de Montlouis, the wealthiest family in the neighbourhood.

Firmly seated on her little throne, which had never been threatened with a rival, the notary's wife had felt a little anxious at the apparition on the scene of a Parisian lady of high birth and large fortune. She apprehended danger from that quarter, and like a skilful general, determined to go and judge with her own eyes of the extent of the peril. In case it proved imminent, she was not a woman likely to succumb without a struggle. Heroic measures were already floating in her mind. "If it is necessary," she thought, "I shall get my gowns from Paris."

When, after these desperate resolutions, she found herself in presence of a thin, pale, gentle, sickly-looking woman in a lilac silk dress and a plain white lace cap on her head, Madame Lescalle felt reassured, and still more by the fact that two or three silvery grey hairs were to be seen in the smooth black bands which lined the Countess' white forehead. It was evident that Madame de Védelles did not care how she dressed, and would never be a leader of fashion at La Ciotat.

In the mean time the good lady, who had no idea what was passing in the mind of the notary's wife, was wondering at the peculiarities of her dress and manner. In spite of a stumpy figure and a too great *embonpoint*, Madame Lescalle had been and was still considered pretty. Her

complexion was blooming, her features regular, her countenance good-humoured, and if she had been dressed with a little of that taste she was always talking about, she would have been a pleasing-looking person, but by dint of absurd pretensions she often made herself ridiculous.

A great desire to dazzle the eyes of the inhabitants of La Pinéde had led to an unfortunate display of magnificence in her dress on that particular day. She wore a bright green Chaly gown, the pattern of which represented branches of coral, with immense sleeves inwardly sustained by internal circles of whalebone, which gave them no chance of collapsing. An imitation Cashmere shawl, a pink bonnet surmounted by a bunch of flowers which would have filled a *jardinière*, completed this astonishing toilette.

From the first moment they met, these two ladies felt how little there was or ever could be in common between them, even with regard to that ordinary sort of intimacy which presupposes a certain degree of similarity in habits and tone of mind. They did not feel the least at their ease with each other during that first interview, and had it not been for Madame Lescalle's inveterate custom of asking as many questions as possible, conversation would have languished. But uncertain as she was of another opportunity of seeing the Countess, and

ıxious to collect from her an ample harvest of etails about Paris, she made the best of her time.

Innumerable were her questions concerning ress, of course, and then theatres, parties, balls, ıd even the dishes then in fashion, for Madame escalle, with all her finery, was also a good house-eeper.

Poor Madame de Védelles was very much be-indhand in all these respects. Her delicate health ıd pious habits of life had always kept her out of ıe way of worldly pleasures, and she was obliged › acknowledge her ignorance on several of those ıbjects in a way that perfectly astonished Madame escalle.

One strange question she addressed to Madame e Védelles: "Does it not surprise you very much, adame," she said, "to see the sun here?"

"Why should it surprise me?" was the answer.

"I have been told that there is never any ınshine in Paris. It must be very dull."

Madame de Védelles could not help smiling, ıd found it no easy matter to alter Madame escalle's impressions on that point. In order › interrupt the unceasing course of her visitor's ıestions, she turned to Rose Lescalle, who had ›mained till then in the background. Her dress as a great contrast to her mother's toilette. It so appened that she had returned only a few days

before from the Convent of the Dames Bernardines at Marseilles, and was still wearing the school uniform. She felt a little ashamed of her plain blue frock, her white scarf, and her straw hat lined with black velvet. But in spite of her bashfulness and somewhat awkward appearance, Rose Lescalle was really very pretty. She was then just seventeen. Except a rather plump and rounded figure, there was no likeness in her to her mother. She was fair, a very unusual thing in Provence, and a profusion of soft, smooth, golden hair surrounded her cheeks and encircled her head in two magnificent plaits. Her eyes were of so dark a blue that they looked black by candle-light, their expression was sweet and shy, and at the same time open and confiding. The extreme delicacy of her features and her very small nose gave rather a childish look to her face. She looked like a beautiful little girl of two or three years old dressed as a grown-up person and seen through a magnifying-glass. As to her complexion it was simply dazzling. For once the name of Rose had turned out appropriate.

Jacques was at once struck with astonishment at the mother's dress, and with admiration at the daughter's beauty. He tried to converse with the pretty Provençale, but could not obtain anything more than a yes or a no in answer to his questions. His mother was a little more successful.

"Do you like the country, mademoiselle?"

"I don't know, madame. I have never lived in the country."

"Then I suppose you like a town life better?"

"I have not tried yet living in a town, so I cannot tell if I shall like it."

Jacques laughed and said: "But you must have lived somewhere, mademoiselle, either in a town or in the country?"

"No, sir!" Rose answered. "I have spent six years in a convent, and if you had been at school there, you would know that it is not like being either in the country or in a town."

"You are quite right, mademoiselle. I understand now what you mean. A convent is not like any other place. You see people in the parlour, but it is not like meeting them in a *salon*. You have a garden to walk in, and trees to look at, but it is not like real country."

In the course of their walk round the grounds, the ladies, escorted by Jacques, passed by the threshing-floor. There they found George kneeling against a low wall, his chin resting on his hands, and his whole attention engaged in watching something on the ground.

"What are you doing there, my dear boy?" Madame de Védelles asked.

George stood up, bowed to Madame Lescalle, and looked rather foolish.

"What were you so intent upon?" his mother inquired.

"Perhaps monsieur was watching those two beetles fighting in the grass," Madame Lescalle said, meaning it as a joke.

"Yes," George answered, "I have been looking at them for the last half-hour. They are wonderful creatures. Do you see that one with the blue scales, mother? It is such a beauty."

"My son George is a great child, I think," Madame de Védelles said, smiling rather sadly and kissing her son's forehead.

"Come along with us," Jacques said, drawing his brother's arm in his. George made no resistance, and Rose seemed more at her ease than when walking alone with Jacques behind the two mothers. She even ventured to remark upon the beauty of the flowers, and Jacques tried to keep up the conversation.

"I suppose, mademoiselle," he said, "that La Pinéde is one of the prettiest places in this neighbourhood?"

She shook her head and answered: "La Tour and Fond Saint are also very nice country houses. The views are not so fine, but then the gardens are much more neatly kept. You do not see in them

those straggling vines which hang on all the trees here."

"You do not like them?"

"No, because they destroy the trees, and prevent them from bearing fruit. And only look how those caper-bushes are springing up in every direction. My father says nothing injures a place so much. When once they take possession of the soil there is no getting rid of them."

"And why should they be got rid of?" George asked; "the lilac flowers of the caper-bush are lovely, with their long pistils which look like plumes."

"Yes, they are very pretty, but still I think you ought to have them pulled up."

"Why?"

"Because you could plant that hill-side with lucerne. It would grow as you have water here, and be a profitable crop. Lucerne sells very well in this country where there is so little hay."

Jacques could not help smiling at the childish gravity with which the notary's pretty daughter enunciated these utilitarian ideas, and at George's look of unutterable contempt for them.

"Does M. le Comte mean to cultivate all this land?" Rose inquired.

"I hope not indeed," George hastily rejoined; "they can make a kitchen-garden somewhere out of sight."

Rose opened her large blue eyes very wide, and said, "Would you really not wish to improve this property?"

"I hate improvements," George answered, and Jacques laughingly said that *he* meant to plant a great many rose-bushes about the place, and then Mdlle. Lescalle, when she came to La Pinéde, would find herself surrounded by her namesakes.

This rather stupid compliment did not seem to displease the young lady, who blushed and smiled, and in so doing showed a row of the whitest little teeth.

Before the visitors left, the whole party sat down for a moment on the terrace. Madame Lescalle caught sight of the acacia branch which had pushed its way into George's bedroom. "Dear me," she exclaimed, "did they really make over the house to you in this dreadful state? That horrid tree has quite spoilt the window. I could send you a carpenter this very evening, Madame la Comtesse, to saw off that abominable branch and mend the casement."

"Do not take that trouble, madame," Jacques said. "It is into my brother's room that the branch trespasses, and George will not hear of cutting it down."

"Oh, what an extraordinary idea!"

"It is a fancy of his."

"But the effect is so bad. It spoils the symmetry of this side of the house, and it just happens that it is the only side of La Pinéde which is at all symmetrical. What a pity it is that the windows are so badly placed—otherwise it would be a handsome house. In those old times they had no idea how to build."

At that moment M. Lescalle's reappearance put an end to the discussion, and soon afterwards the visitors departed.

As they walked down the avenue, the notary and his family met a carriage, the dusty appearance of which betokened that it came from a distance. Madame Lescalle's eager curiosity could only discern that it contained an elderly gentleman and a lady with a black veil on. "Who are those people?" she inquired of her husband. "They are not any of the neighbours."

"I don't know them by sight," M. Lescalle said, after glancing at the vehicle which passed them rapidly. It stopped at the door of the chateau just as the notary and his family were going out of the gate of the park.

Vincent came forward, and the old gentleman said, "Will you tell Madame la Comtesse de Védelles that Mdlle. Denise de la Pinéde and her guardian have called to see her."

CHAPTER IV.

MORE VISITORS.

MDLLE. DENISE DE LA PINÉDE was still in deep mourning for her father. Her plain black travelling-dress, made like a riding-habit, became her tall graceful figure. Round her neck she wore a simple white muslin collar, and on her head a large black felt hat like those worn by the peasant women in Provence. Her regular features, large dark eyes, delicately white complexion, and the masses of black hair on each side of her face, were in keeping with the simplicity of her dress and the mild, serious expression of her countenance. She looked the high-born lady that she was.

M. Legrand, her guardian, was a singularly common-place individual. The most remarkable things about him were his gold spectacles and an imperturbably self-complacent manner.

Whilst they waited for Madame de Védelles, he seated himself in an arm-chair and read the newspaper. Denise stood in the middle of the room and looked about her. After the lapse of

sixteen years, she was gazing again on that once familiar scene! on that room where she used to play about near her mother's couch, at the arm-chair her father used to sit in when he came home from shooting. Nothing was changed in that drawing-room. Each piece of furniture was in its old place. The buhl clock was ticking with the sound she so well remembered. Flowers filled the old vases in the corners of the room. All looked the same; but sixteen years had elapsed. Both her father and her mother were dead—La Pinéde sold. Here she was as a visitor in the house where she had been born and had begun what seemed such a bright existence!

It was a strange feeling, a wonderful change! She looked at everything with that sad, curious attention with which the eye rests on once familiar scenes, and as the past rose before her with overpowering intensity, the orphan girl felt more deeply than she had ever done before the yearning pain of bereavement, the utter loneliness of her position. Her heart swelled with this consciousness, and silent tears coursed down her pale, beautiful face. She did not perceive that there was some one looking at her. George de Védelles had been standing for some minutes at the door, entranced, absorbed, in a state of intense and wondering admiration.

The Comte and Comtesse's entrance interrupted

George's ecstasy, Denise's contemplation, and M. Legrand's perusal of the *Journal des Débats*.

Mdlle. de la Pinéde made a strong effort over herself, wiped her eyes, and hastening towards Madame de Védelles, said to her in a low, tremulous voice, "I am sure, dear Madame de Védelles, that you understand the feelings of a poor girl who, after so many years, sees again the home of her childhood, and that with your usual kindness you sympathize with her."

The Countess took the hands of her young friend in hers and pressed them affectionately. After a few words of sympathy and interest had been uttered and answered, Mdlle. de la Pinéde explained that the Comte de Védelles having written to her guardian to ask for the list of the family pictures and the things that had belonged to the late Madame de la Pinéde, and not been included in the sale of the house as it stood—by the express desire of Count Honoré, who had foreseen the possibility of his daughter's selling the place—she had thought it better to come herself from Toulon, where she was staying with an aunt of hers, in order to point out what these exceptions were, and to arrange the matter with her kind friends.

Denise had such a pleasant voice, and such a charming way of speaking, everything she said was so courteous and so well expressed, that even the old Count, who would naturally have been disputa-

tious and inclined to stand on his rights, fell completely under the charm, and hastened to say that Mdlle. Pinéde had but to go through the rooms and point out whatever she wished to be sent to her, and her directions would be immediately complied with.

It was settled that the visitors should first take some refreshment, and then the business was to be proceeded with. In the mean time the following conversation was carried on.

"Shall you come to Paris next winter?" Denise asked the Countess.

"Oh, no; we have entirely given up Paris."

"On account of the climate?"

"Yes; I cannot spend the winter there."

"We sold Valsec only because my wife's health required a southern climate," the Count said.

"And do you mean always to live in the country? Will you not find it rather dull?"

"Oh, no; we have made up our minds to retire from the world. At your age you cannot understand such a resolution. You would think it very tiresome always to remain here."

Denise smiled, and said, "I do not think it would quite suit me."

"How do you like Toulon?"

"I should not be sorry to go back to Paris."

"Ah, I thought so," the Count said. "I know what Toulon is like, and the sort of society there:

sailors and old dowagers, amusing enough to look at, but desperately dull to talk to. I suppose you do not mean, mademoiselle, to vegetate long in such a place."

"I am going to remain there some time longer."

"What can induce you to do so?"

"My aunt is very kind, and wishes me to stay with her as long as possible."

"Mdlle. de la Pinéde invents all sorts of strange amusements for herself," M. Legrand said. "You would never guess how she wiles away the time in that horrid seaport town."

George, who had been leaning on the back of his mother's chair without joining in the conversation, but with his eyes and his ears intently engaged on every word that was uttered, ventured to say in a low voice, "How, I wonder!"

M. Legrand laughed. "I shall get into a scrape, I suppose, if I speak of *l'œuvre des petits matelots.*"

Denise turned to the Countess with a smile, and said, "It is only to you, dear madame, that I will let M. Legrand mention my hobbies. We had many common interests in Paris. You know that you were the first person who took me to one of the meetings of the Sainte Famille."

"Oh, that is another of Mdlle. Denise's enterprises at Toulon. She leads the ladies of the town

a weary life with her Parisian activity. Our Provençales are rather inclined to the *dolce far niente* of their Italian neighbours."

"Then they would suit you, George," the Count said to his son, whose pale cheeks suddenly reddened at being thus addressed in the presence of Mdlle. de la Pinéde, whose dark, speaking eyes turned upon him with an inquiring expression.

"I shall tell you one advantage you may derive from your residence in the south, my dear," the Countess said to her young friend. "The climate will still further improve your very beautiful voice. Your talent can hardly admit of improvement. Have you been singing much lately?"

"Has not she got up a choir in the Church of St. Ildegonde," M. Legrand exclaimed, "which is the admiration of the whole town. It has become the fashion to go to Vespers since Mdlle. Denise has begun to play the organ and to lead the choir."

"How odious it is," Denise exclaimed, "to think of fashion having anything to do with the worship of God!"

"Better that it should be the fashion to go to church than to stay away, my dear," Madame de Védelles said.

"Ah," Denise rejoined, "I suppose you think like the English poet who said that there are some 'who come to scoff and who remain to pray.'"

George's eyes seemed to grow more eloquent every moment as he listened to this conversation, and it was like awaking from a pleasant dream to be asked by his father to go to his study and fetch from it some papers relating to the personal property and the recent purchases connected with the chateau and the estate, which he wished to examine with M. Legrand.

He at once left the room; but on his way upstairs entirely forgot what he had been sent to do, passed absently before the door of the study, went into his own room, walked up and down for a few minutes, and then leaning against the window, fell into a fit of deep musing.

Meanwhile Jacques, who had been out, came in shortly afterwards, and M. de Védelles presented him to the young heiress with a feeling of conscious pride. The way in which he spoke of Jacques as "my son," made her ask, "Is the young man who was here a moment ago also your son?"

"Yes; my youngest son," the Count answered, "an overgrown schoolboy, without any manners or conversation. He is so shy, that I was afraid of introducing him to you. By the by," he added, turning to Jacques, "do go and see what he is about. I sent him half an hour ago to my study for some papers. I dare say he is quite puzzled to find them. He has no head for anything."

"He is not in the study," Jacques answered; "I saw him, as I came in, at the window of his room, staring, as usual, at the view. I called to him, but he did not answer, and disappeared."

"Go and tell him," the Countess said in a whisper, "to be sure to be in time for dinner. Mdlle. de la Pinéde and her guardian will stay and dine with us."

Jacques went to give his brother this message, and then came back and tried to make himself agreeable to his mother's young guest. He evidently was as much struck with her as George, but his admiration was evinced in quite a different manner. Nothing could be more opposite in looks, in character, and in manner than M. de Védelles' sons. Jacques was eight years older than George, and most people would have said much the handsomest of the two.

The de Védelles were originally of Norman extraction, and he had all the distinctive characteristics of his father's family. Strong, tall, fair-haired, with a fine complexion and white teeth, he presented a perfect type of the manly beauty of the race to which he belonged, whereas George resembled his mother, who was of Spanish extraction, and a creole of the isle of Cuba.

Jacques knew perfectly well how to set himself off to the best advantage, both as to dress and as

to manner. He had talents and cleverness, and made the most of them. A general favourite wherever he went, his confidence in his powers of pleasing was very great, but not offensively displayed. With considerable quickness he discerned that the light and chaffing tone which was habitual to him when conversing with young ladies would not suit Mdlle. de la Pinéde, and without conscious hypocrisy or affectation, he talked of things he thought likely to interest her, and gave it to be understood that he might be induced even to take—some day—a practical interest in many subjects he had hitherto little studied.

George scarcely opened his lips before or after dinner. He had made, under old Vincent's superintendence, a rather unsuccessful attempt at dressing for the occasion: submitted to have his hair brushed in a fashionable manner, and put on a white waistcoat and a coat and trousers which showed him to have grown considerably since those garments had been made. His attire was not in keeping with his style of looks, and his excessive shyness made him awkward and almost ridiculous, so that Denise easily accepted the disparaging description his father had given of him, and concluded that his mind was as deficient as his manners were strange.

Still she seemed interested about him, and as

she talked with his brother, often turned towards him, and tried to make him join in the conversation. But whenever she addressed a question to the poor youth, he looked so distressed that at last she thought it kinder not to speak to him.

When the meal was over, and coffee had been served on the terrace, M. de Védelles and M. Legrand retired to discuss matters of business, and Madame de Védelles and Mdlle. de la Pinéde, by the Count's desire, went over the house for the purpose of marking out the pictures and the articles of furniture which the latter was entitled to claim.

The Countess was not clever or observant, but full of sweetness and kindness. Her gentle sympathy softened what she felt must be a painful task to the orphan girl, who went through it in a calm, deliberate manner as a matter of duty, but, except when she came upon pictures of her parents or her mother's own work-box, showed little care or emotion. She consulted a list in her hand, drawn up by her father, and verified its accuracy.

When they returned to the drawing-room, she took Madame de Védelles' hand in hers, and said:

"My dear Countess, I am going to make rather a strange request. You have always been so kind to me, coming to see me at the Sacré Cœur, and to-day you have been so full of tenderness and sympathy, that I feel I may look upon you as a

friend. Might I ask you to leave all these things with you? I don't want to take them away; I should like them to be here—to remain here."

"We will keep them as long as you like for you, dear Denise. I dare say it will be more convenient for you not to remove them till you have a house of your own."

"That is not what I mean. I should always like to think of them as being here. I have some of my dear father's feeling about this place. In my heart and thoughts it will be always sacred to the memory of my parents. What they looked upon, what they touched, what they used, had better be here than elsewhere."

The young girl hid her face in her hands, and gave way to a burst of tears. Madame de Védelles gently stroked her hand, and for a few minutes did not speak. Many rapid thoughts passed through her mind.

"Why did she sell the place as she cares for it so much? Does she now regret that she did so? What a strange idea to want to leave all those souvenirs here! Dear me! I wonder! Such things have, they say, happened as——. Jacques is so handsome, so pleasing. Has it occurred to her as a possibility? What a perfect thing it would be for both of them! She is going to stay some time at Toulon. How glad I should be!"

"Forgive me for being so foolish," Denise said. "I do not often shed tears, and now it is all over."

She raised her head, and there was a sweet and beautiful smile on her face—so full of peace and serenity, that Madame de Védelles felt surprised at the sudden change.

"Will you do what I asked you?" Denise said.

"I must speak to my husband first; but I think I can answer for him that he will agree to keep these things as long as ever you wish them to stay here, and to send them to you whenever you claim them."

"I shall *never* claim them," Denise said in a tone of such decision that Madame de Védelles could only say:

"At any rate, they will always be at your disposal. By the way, there is a box I must also show you."

"George," she said, for at that moment she saw her youngest son on the terrace, sitting on the parapet with his dog, and watching his mother and Denise as they sat in the drawing-room. "George, go up to the lumber-room, and bring here a box on which you will see written, 'Mdlle. de la Pinéde's toys.'"

George disappeared, and brought back that very box which had for so many years stood on the couch near which Madame de Védelles and Denise were

sitting. He laid it on the table, removed the lid, and took out of it the little sheep with their pink collars, the wooden animals, the hunters and shepherdesses, and spread them before Denise, who took them in her hand, one by one, sighed, then smiled, and said:

"Yes; how well I remember them. They were the delight of my childhood. I often asked my poor father for them. It was those little sheep I was so fond of. He used to buy me all the most wonderful toys that could be found in Paris; but I never had any just like these." After looking at them a little while, she said, "I suppose there are some poor little children in the neighbourhood whom you could make happy, dear Countess, by giving them my dear old toys?"

"May I have them?" George eagerly said.

Denise laughed, but Madame de Védelles looked vexed.

"Really, my boy, with your passion for collecting odds and ends, you will give to people the idea that you are a grown-up baby."

"I don't care what people think," George said. "Mademoiselle, may I have these things?"

Denise laughed, and said, "Yes, if you can reconcile it to your conscience to deprive the poor children of that boxful of happiness."

"I will go to Toulon, and buy a cartload of toys

for all the little beggars round La Pinéde, and then, I suppose, *I* may keep this boxful of happiness?"

Those last words were said with a sort of emotion that did not escape Denise's notice.

"What a strange youth that is," she thought.

Jacques reappeared just then, and, till the visitors departed, devoted himself to Mdlle. de la Pinéde, and flattered himself, when she drove off, that she had found him very agreeable. He asked leave to call on her aunt when—as was often the case—he was at Toulon. She answered civilly, and took an affectionate leave of the Countess.

Madame de Védelles told her husband of Denise's strange wish to leave all her souvenirs and family pictures at La Pinéde, and confided to him the idea that had passed through her mind.

"Well, my dear wife," the Count answered, "bring that about if you can. Nothing would help on better Jacques' election or his prospects in life than to marry this beautiful heiress; so I give you full leave to promote this most desirable result. But believe my experience. Hurry it on slowly. Girls with beauty and fortune require to be carefully dealt with, and he must make his way with her himself before we sound M. Legrand on the subject. I suspect the young lady is like you, my dear wife, devout and clerical; Jacques—bad fellow that he is, and more or less Voltairian——"

"Do not say that, my dear husband. It makes me so miserable."

"If you succeed in marrying him to Mdlle. de la Pinéde, she will convert him. I never saw a woman who gave me, at first sight, so much the idea of strength of character. Depend upon it, she will influence all those she has to do with."

"Thank God for that. It will always be in a right direction," and the poor mother began to pray that night for the success of the scheme she had so fondly devised.

Before retiring to her room, she had ascertained from Jacques that he thought Mdlle. de la Pinéde wonderfully handsome, and refrained, with difficulty, from hinting at her hopes. Before wishing him good night, she said:

"I was so grieved at dear George's asking Denise to give him her old playthings. It made me feel quite uncomfortable. I am glad his father was not in the room."

CHAPTER V.

MISÉ MÉDÉ.

LEAVING for awhile the de Védelles occupied each with his or her own private cogitations relative to the visit of the beautiful Denise, we shall follow M. Lescalle and his wife and daughter to a country house called "Les Capucins," which belonged to an aunt of his, with whom they were going to spend the rest of the day.

This aunt was a maiden lady, who had been given the rather affected name of Mesdélices, but in the familiar Provençal patois, was called by everybody Misé, that is Madame Médé.

Mdlle. Lescalle's youth had witnessed the stormy scenes of the first Revolution. When, under the Empire, order was re-established, and property resumed its rights, she found herself in possession of a valuable little estate, and, though somewhat advanced in age, received many a proposal of marriage. The old Baron de Croixfonds compromised his ancestral dignity so far as to solicit the hand of Misé Médé, but his and every other offer of the

kind was rejected. Mesdélices Lescalle knew perfectly well that at her age it was only her fortune that attracted suitors, and independently of other reasons this would have been enough to determine her to remain single.

Young Lescalle, her nephew, was, at that time, in Paris, studying for the Bar. He had often recourse to Aunt Médé's purse when his extravagant love of amusement and expense involved him in pecuniary difficulties. After a few years' residence in Paris, young Lescalle found himself provided, indeed, with diplomas, but with no means of existence but his own talents, which he was intelligent enough not to rate very highly.

Such being the case, he gladly accepted his aunt's offer to purchase for him an attorney's office in his native town. From that moment, Toussaint Lescalle entirely changed his habits of life; he married, and became steady and hard-working—the dissipated student of the École de Droit was transformed into a respectable man of business, and was very severe upon those who ventured to live as he had done in past days. It was rather amusing to hear him find fault with Misé Médé for her charitable indulgence towards people who fell into distress through their own extravagance.

In 1819, the birth of Rose gave Mdlle. Lescalle a feeling of intense happiness. When she looked

at the helpless little creature, just come into the world, all the tenderness and depth of feeling in her nature was called forth; all that sort of motherly affection which is dormant in many a woman's heart, and is ready to spend itself in its rich abundance on some object near and dear to it, which Providence, sometimes late in life, places in its way.

Holding the baby in her arms, she hastened to her nephew's room, and said: "Toussaint, if you feel any gratitude at all for the affection I have always shown you, do grant me what I am going to ask."

"What is it, dear old aunt? There is nothing I would not do for you."

"Let me bring up your little girl."

"What! would you really wish that, Aunt Médé?"

"Yes; I want to take her and her nurse to The Capucins. You and your wife could come and see her as often as you liked. Do let me have her, my dear nephew; I have set my heart upon it."

"This is a very sudden thought, Aunt Médé; you never said anything about it before. How came you to think of it now?"

"When I saw her, and kissed her, I understood for the first time, the deep love one can have for a little child. It was quite a new emotion; and

then the thought came into my mind that you would let me take charge of her."

M. Lescalle rapidly revolved in his mind the merits of this proposal, and then said, "Well, for my part, Aunt Médé, I see no objection to what you wish. The child will be better off with you than with any one else, that I am sure of. If you can settle it with my wife, you can rely on my consent."

Madame Lescalle did not long resist the earnest entreaties of her husband's aunt, and Misé Médé carried off the baby in triumph to her country house.

From that moment her life, which had been so long a solitary one, underwent a great change. She loved little Rose with an intense affection, which filled her heart with overflowing delight. She was her joy, her thought, her care of every instant; and that large rambling house, which had been before so silent and so still, was soon enlivened by the sound of childish laughter and the pattering of infant feet.

Misé Médé's country house had formerly been the ancient and famous Convent of the Capuchins of La Ciotat. It was built on a slanting part of the beach, beneath which the waves of the Mediterranean were continually breaking against a belt of small rocks, just rising above the surface of the

water. The situation was beautiful, and the terrace and the garden looked on a magnificent view of the coast on both sides, and on an unlimited expanse of deep blue sea.

This spot had been well chosen for a convent. We never feel so strongly God's greatness and our own littleness as when we gaze on the boundless sky and the fathomless ocean.

It was in this delightful spot, in the midst of the loveliest works of nature, and under the loving and fostering care of her great aunt, that Rose spent the time of her childhood. In her eleventh year, M. Lescalle decided that she was to go to school.

Misé Médé wept in silence for some days, but did not try to persuade her nephew to alter his intention. In her deep humility, she thought herself unequal to the task of educating Rose, and though she would never have volunteered to part with her, when her parents spoke of it, she submitted to it with silent anguish.

M. Lescalle made a mistake in proposing, and Misé Médé in acquiescing in this measure. If he had possessed a wiser judgment and a warmer heart, if she had not been deceived by her saintly ignorance of her own merits, they would not have thought it an advantage for Rose. The society of one so holy and so sensible as her old aunt, the

knowledge derived from her experience in life—a life which, like so many of those which began during the terrible period of the first French Revolution, had gained from an early acquaintance with suffering and persecution a peculiar strength and generosity, would have been a far higher and better training for a young girl than that of a boarding-school in a country town, under the care of good and pious women, not highly educated themselves, and obliged by the exigences of parents of the middling class to attend to their pupils acquiring showy accomplishments, and a smattering of learning, in preference to useful practical information.

The school where Rose spent six years was immeasurably better for her than her father and mother's society, and the influence of Madame Lescalle's worldly example and gossiping acquaintances; but it was as decidedly inferior to what she would have gained in daily intercourse with her Aunt Médé, as were the straight alleys and high walls of the convent play-ground, to the glorious expanse and lovely views of the old Capuchin monastery.

But it was not to be expected that M. Lescalle would understand this, and so his daughter had to learn the elements of various sciences in dull abridgments, and to tire her little fingers by

running endless scales on the yellow keys of a consumptive pianoforte.

When she came home, Rose Lescalle had made a good First Communion, and since that time had kept up habits of piety which in her father's house would certainly not have been the case. But it may be doubted whether she knew as much of solid virtue and real religion as when she had left The Capucins, or was prepared to encounter the dangers of the world she was entering upon, as if, during those years when the mind receives its strongest impress, she had been under the wing of Misé Médé. The society of her schoolfellows had not tended to elevate her tone of mind, or improve her character.

The calm good sense of the old lady made her perceive it at once, but she also saw that Rose was an innocent and loving child, and that no real harm was done. The good nuns, in spite of the unfavourable effects of association with girls some of whom had been brought up in irreligious homes, had preserved her faith, and maintained her in the practice of her duties. Mdlle. Lescalle felt, on the whole, satisfied and hopeful that she might now resume all her influence over the child of her heart.

As to Rose's parents, they were enchanted with her accomplishments. She could play a long sonata of Hertz, without making a single mistake,

and brought home gigantic heads of Niobe and Romulus, drawn in red chalk. She could speak a little English, not quite with what Madame de Stael calls the "pure insular accent," but, at any rate, what sounded like English in her father's ears, who had once been in London for two days.

It can easily be supposed that in her solitary life the least circumstance connected with Rose assumed a high importance in Misé Médé's eyes. So she made her nephew promise that he at any rate would call on his way back from La Pinéde. She wanted to know how Rose had got through this sort of first introduction into society. Contrary to her usual habits, she felt restless all the morning, and ten times in the course of an hour, looked out of the window. At last, she could not remain indoors any longer, and seated herself on a stone bench in the garden, from whence she could see the road. There she sat, knitting with a sort of feverish activity a thick stocking for her charity bag.

Misé Médé was then about seventy years of age. She was tall, thin, and as straight as an arrow. Her face rather long, her nose aquiline, her lips compressed, in consequence of the loss of her front teeth. Her features indicated a great strength of will, and would have been, perhaps, a little stern, if it had not been for the sweet

expression of her large, grey, and still very beautiful eyes.

Her dress was half like that of a nun, half like that of a peasant. It consisted of a gown made of a thick, dark stuff; a round white plaited cap, and a stiffly-starched handkerchief standing out in projecting folds over her bosom.

When Madame Lescalle's wonderful bonnet appeared in the road, the old lady rose and went to meet her relatives.

"Well, Virginie," she said, "are you pleased with your visit?"

Madame Lescalle shrugged her shoulders, and answered, "Madame de Védelles was civil enough; but she is not particularly agreeable. I think she is as stiff as a poker—that woman."

"And the Count?"

"Upon my word, I hardly saw him. He just bowed to us and that was all."

"My dear," M. Toussaint put in, "the Count had to speak to me on business."

"Oh, of course; but he might have said a few words to us."

"He sent his son to make acquaintance with you."

"Oh, yes! and a charming young man he is; so handsome and tall, and conversable too, quite different from his parents."

"He is the eldest son, the one they call—What do they call him?" M. Lescalle asked.

"M. Jacques," Rose said.

"Ah! you remember his name, mademoiselle," Madame Lescalle laughingly remarked, and then added in a low voice to Aunt Médé, "He looked a great deal at Rose, and he said something complimentary about her complexion."

"She is not an ugly little thing," the aunt rejoined, kissing one of Rose's blooming cheeks.

"But what is far better than compliments, Aunt Médé," M. Toussaint said, "is the certainty of being employed in the entire management of the Count's affairs. He is tired of business, and means in future to leave everything to me. This will necessitate my being a great deal at La Pinéde. I am going to breakfast there to-morrow. We have to talk about the lease of a farm."

"How angry the Arnoux will be," Madame Lescalle exclaimed.

"Oh! but you must not say anything about it, Virginie."

"Why not?"

"It is better M. Arnoux should suppose I go there as a friend. It will have a better effect."

"My poor dear Toussaint," Aunt Médé exclaimed, "what a foolish sort of vanity that is!"

"My dear aunt, people value us according to

the value we set on ourselves. I learnt that in Paris. For one person who looks into things, five hundred take them on trust, and believe you are what you give yourself out to be."

"I do not like that principle," Aunt Médé said. "I know of a better one, I think."

"What is it, Aunt Médé?"

"It is better to be, than to seem, worthy of esteem."

"Oh! that is a fine sentence for a copy-book, Misé Médé; but those high flights do not answer in real life. Come, now, you must admit that if they think me in the town on intimate terms at the chateau, it will give me a sort of prestige. If I am simply considered as the factotum of the old Count, it will not do me half so much good. Trust to me, my dear aunt. I know how to steer my little bark. It has made good way already. I am considered an influential person at the elections, and people make up to me in consequence—the Richers on the one hand, old Croixfonds on the other. I am not quite sure that the Védelles have not some notions of that sort too. I am rather inclined to think so; but the future will show. Now, let us go to dinner, and converse whilst we eat."

They all went into the house, and then on the terrace, where dinner was served amidst the orange trees, at the place where the view was most beautiful

and extensive. To the right rose the crested walls and picturesque gateways of La Ciotat, surmounted by the roofs of the houses. Further on a high rock, called the Eagle's Beak, stood out in bold relief against the deep blue sky. To the left a beautiful range of hills enfolded the bay in which lies the port of Toulon; on the foreground, exactly opposite, was the picturesque little islet called l'Ile Verte, and the sea glittering like burnished gold in the broad sunshine.

It was just at the same hour that George de Védelles was standing at his window, absently gazing on the magnificent landscape.

"Does not the sea look beautiful from my terrace, Rosette?" Aunt Médé said to her niece. "We have taken away all the palisades which used to surround it, little one, to prevent your falling over the edge, and nothing now impedes the view."

"Oh, Aunt Médé, it is indeed very beautiful," the young girl said, and then for a moment remained in silent admiration. "I never saw so bright a sunshine as that at St. Benoit, the walls were so high." And then the conversation turned again on the inhabitants of the chateau.

In the midst of Madame Lescalle's rather prosy descriptions, Misé Médé said, "But you only speak of one young man. I thought the Countess had two sons?"

"Yes, Aunt Médé," Rose answered, "there is another, the youngest son, a pale, slight, strange-looking youth."

"No one pays any attention to him," Madame Lescalle rejoined. "He is a funny sort of creature—half-witted, I think. Between ourselves, people say he is a *fada*,[1] and I dare say they are right."

"Who says so?" M. Lescalle asked.

"Oh, I don't know—everybody. Gautier, the farmer at La Pinéde, who sometimes works in the garden, and Marion the milkwoman."

"What do they know about it?"

"Marion says that as she was going in the night to Beausset with her son, they saw a ghost, as they thought, walking by the seaside. They were dreadfully afraid at first, but as they came nearer, who should it have been but that young de Védelles. She spoke to him, but he made no answer at all, and walked away in another direction. She said he looked as pale as a ghost, and stared at them ever so strangely."

"How can you listen to such foolish gossiping stories, Virginie?" the notary said.

"Oh, I suppose you think, then, that there is

[1] *Fada*, in the dialect of the south of France, does not mean exactly an idiot, but a grown-up person who remains in mind and habits a child.

nothing strange in a man's mooning about the beach at three o'clock in the morning, when he ought to have been in bed."

"I dare say it was some piece of nonsense. Perhaps he meant to frighten the women going to market."

"Very likely indeed; but unless a man is a *fada*, he does not play such tricks when he is no longer a schoolboy."

"Perhaps if this poor young man is in the state you suppose," Aunt Médé said, "he may be restless and nervous. *Fadas* have often delicate nerves, and are bad sleepers. Did the Countess say anything about her son's health?"

"No; but I think she seemed a little ashamed of him. She looked quite distressed when he left Rose and me so suddenly."

"And the Count?"

"He did not mention him at all," M. Lescalle answered. "I do not think he likes him."

"Poor youth!" Misé Médé said, "who would care for him if his mother died?"

"Do not distress yourself about that, my dear aunt," M. Lescalle answered. "His father is very rich, and it will not be difficult to find him a wife. When a man can give his son fifteen thousand francs a year, there is no difficulty in getting some one to look after him."

"Oh, father," Rose exclaimed, "who would marry a *fada?*"

"I am quite of Rose's opinion," Misé Médé said.

"Oh, I don't know," M. Lescalle rejoined. "I dare say this young gentleman would make a very good husband. A wife would do what she liked with him, and have her own way about everything."

"But, papa, this M. George is not like a child who would do all he was told. He has all sorts of strange fancies and odd obstinacies. He does not want his father to cultivate his land, because he likes the flowers of the caper-bushes. He will not let them cut down a branch that runs into his window, and he lives in a sort of lumber-room, where he keeps all sorts of strange, useless things. And he does not dress like other people, he looks so untidy, not at all like the son of a count."

"What Rose says is perfectly true," Madame Lescalle rejoined, "and moreover, he does not seem to understand when people speak to him."

"All this may be as you say, my dear," her husband observed, "but I maintain that it will be easy to find somebody who would be glad enough to marry this youth. It is pleasant to have a rich husband, and to be called La Baronne de Védelles."

"How can you talk in that way, Toussaint!" Madame Lescalle exclaimed. "What, marry a *fada!* It is dreadful to think of. It gives me quite a horror. I had rather beg my bread than have such an idiot for my husband."

"Well, well, Madame Lescalle, do not fly into a passion. Nobody wants you to marry him."

The conversation then turned on some other subject, and after dinner Misé Médé's relatives took leave of her. They were all more or less thoughtful on their way back to town. M. Lescalle was turning over in his mind how he could make the most of his position at La Pinéde. His wife was occupied with the idea of sending to Paris for a new gown. Rose involuntarily dwelt on the recollection of Jacques' pleasant, animated countenance, and mused on the flattering words he had said to her. She compared him in her mind with Artémon Richer de Montlouis, the *lion* of La Ciotat, and came to the conclusion that the son of the Comte de Védelles was much better-looking and more agreeable than the said Artemon; but then with a sigh she thought, "He is going back to Paris."

CHAPTER VI.

AN ACCIDENT.

SOME days after the first visit which Mdlle. de la Pinéde had paid to the de Védelles, the Countess drove to Toulon to return the compliment, and to make acquaintance with Denise's aunt, a good-natured, commonplace, elderly lady, who was very fond of her niece, of her pet dogs, and her little comforts. Denise was out, and so Madame de Védelles had an opportunity of spending an hour with Madame de Brissac, and availed herself of it by trying to find out whether there was any marriage in question for the young lady, and what were the ideas of her aunt and her guardian on the subject. If she did not succeed in obtaining any positive information about it, at any rate she satisfied herself that at present there existed no definite obstacle to the scheme which she had formed in her own mind.

Madame de Brissac said that she hoped her niece would spend the following winter at her guardian's house in Paris, and go out in the world as she had done before her father's death, under

the chaperonage of Madame Legrand, who had daughters of her own, and intimate connections in the Faubourg St. Germain. She had married a wealthy banker, but belonged herself to an old Legitimist family.

"She will not long remain unmarried," Madame de Védelles ventured to say. "With her beauty, her birth, and her fortune, Mdlle. de la Pinéde's hand will be eagerly sought for."

"Ah, even now," Madame de Brissac said, "M. Legrand often receives proposals for her from various quarters. But after her father's death, Denise declared that for one year, at least, she wished nothing to be said to her on the subject, and neither M. Legrand nor myself can get her to speak of her own intentions, or express an opinion as to the eligibility of any *parti* offered to her acceptance."

"Perhaps she is a little romantic, and means to make a marriage *d'inclination*," Madame de Védelles said, "and has not yet seen the person who may please her fancy."

"It may be so. She is very reserved about everything, is Denise. She made, I believe, a promise to her father on his death-bed, not to make any decision for a certain time, and meanwhile I really think she is more occupied about her little sailor boys than her suitors."

Then the conversation changed, and soon afterwards Mdlle. de la Pinéde came into the room. Madame de Védelles and she had many things to talk about. Denise was much interested to hear of that lady's plan of opening a school in the village of Troistour, which was at a distance of about two miles from the chateau, and also of obtaining a second priest, who would assist the very old curé of that parish, and say Mass every day in the small chapel in the grounds of La Pinéde, which, like everything else in the place, had been shut up and left in utter neglect.

Denise had all the *savoir faire* and energy in practical matters which Madame de Védelles was totally deficient in. Her co-operation in these plans was therefore singularly useful. She promised to see the Vicar-General of the diocese, to write to the Superior of an Order which sends out religious schoolmistresses, one by one, into remote and poor localities, and finally to go again herself to La Pinéde to report progress and confer with the Countess, as soon as the answers reached her.

"You know there is nothing, my dear, like talking over these things together," the Countess artfully observed. "More business is done in a quarter of an hour's conversation than by twenty letters."

They were still eagerly discussing these projects

when Jacques de Védelles called for his mother, with whom he had driven into Toulon. He was presented to Madame de Brissac, and quite won that lady's heart. The advice he gave her about the proper diet for her dogs, was proffered in that good-humoured, playful manner which had a great charm for persons of all classes and all ages.

Charlot himself looked up into his handsome face as if he appreciated the interest evinced in his health, and Denise, seeing him so amiable and good-natured, ventured to ask him if he could recommend anything for the cure of a sick poodle she had undertaken that morning to prescribe for.

"Is he a pet of yours, mademoiselle? Could I see him?" Jacques eagerly inquired.

"He is the friend and companion," she answered, "of a poor blind man who sits on the quay, a few doors from the corner of this street, and who is in despair at his illness. I would have taken him to a veterinary surgeon, but his master could not bear to be without him even for a short time, so I promised to get some one to look at the old dog, and see what could be done for him."

"If my mother can wait a few minutes I will go at once, and give master and dog the benefit of my advice. I consider myself clever at doctoring animals. At Valsec I had quite a reputation amongst our farm labourers. They said M. Jacques

had a gift for curing beasts. Have you not heard them say so, mother?"

"I know that has been one of your pretensions, dear Jacques, and I will wait with pleasure whilst you do Mdlle. de la Pinéde's commission."

Jacques was absent about twenty minutes. When he came back he related with a great deal of fun and animation the result of his exertions. How the case had seemed to him beyond his own powers; how he had ascertained the direction of the dog-doctor, dragged him out of his den, and brought him in presence of the dejected poodle. How the very voice of the canine Æsculapius had raised the spirits of the patient and made him wag his tail. How he had prescribed for him a certain powder mixed with his food, and a more generous diet. And that not being quite aware, in spite of his knowledge on the subject, what constituted generous diet for a dog, Jacques had given a piece of twenty francs to his master, and requested him to provide it.

"I assure you, mademoiselle, that I left the whole party in a happy frame of mind, your Belisarius declaring that when Mdlle. Denise took anything in hand it always succeeded, and that the dog-leech was a very clever fellow, and your humble servant worthy of entering into partnership with him. Moreover, that Toupet would certainly get well, seeing he would have the bone of a good

cutlet to gnaw this evening. Between ourselves, my belief is that Toupet was dying of inanition, and that when you walk that way to-morrow, mademoiselle, you will find your protegé perfectly restored to health."

"How very good of you, M. de Védelles, to have taken all this trouble. You must be experienced in the art of doing kindnesses, or you would not be such a proficient in it."

"Is it an art, mademoiselle?"

"If not an art, a talent," Denise replied. "There are generally three or four ways of doing a kind action, and very different degrees of happiness produced according to the one we adopt."

"I had never thought of that," Madame de Védelles said. "I never see but one way of doing things, and it is, I dare say, not the best."

"On the contrary, dear madame," Denise exclaimed, "you have a natural spirit of kindness which guides you better, I am sure, than any amount of thinking would do."

"You are right, my dear; I never think to any good purpose."

"You are mistaken there, my dear little mother," Jacques affectionately said. "You are not conscious of it, but your mind is always occupied with plans for making others happy."

He would have thought so still more if he could

have read her thoughts at that moment, for as she looked at her handsome son and at the beautiful Denise talking together of the blind man and his dog, and saw his look of admiration and her apparent pleasure in listening to his playful, amusing nonsense, visions were passing before her, all tending to his happiness in this world and in the next.

Providence favoured her maternal wishes, or, at least, seemed to favour them, in an unexpected manner, and being the most unselfish of human beings, she rejoiced at an event which had this result, though it involved suffering to herself.

As Jacques and she were returning that day to La Pinéde, a horse harnessed to a light cart, which its master had left standing at the door of a public-house, took fright at something, ran away, and dashing against their *calêche*, overturned it. Jacques escaped unhurt, and so did the driver, but Madame de Védelles' collar-bone was broken and her arm fractured.

It would be difficult to describe the consternation her husband and her sons evinced in different ways, and according to their different characters; but as intense as possible in each case.

The Countess de Védelles was one of those persons who, without cleverness or much capacity of any sort, and apparently singularly helpless and inefficient, by dint of tenderness, gentleness, and

unselfishness, had become essential to her family. As is so often the case, though always delicate in health, she never hardly had been seriously ill, and when it crossed their minds that there was reason for alarm, it struck them for the first time that life without her would be a dreary sort of thing, and that they could not bear to look such a misfortune in the face.

The old Count seemed simply bewildered, and walked twenty times over from her room, where she had been carried, to the drawing-room, unable to realize that she was not going to spend the evening opposite to him, as she had done for the last twenty-eight years. George seated himself in a corner of his mother's bed-chamber, and remained there with his eyes fixed upon her till, her moans becoming more frequent, he could stand it no longer, and snatching up his hat, rushed out of the house, threw himself down, with his face on the grass, and remained in that posture till the surgeon, whom Jacques, the only efficient member of the family, had instantly sent for, arrived from Ciotat, and set the injured limbs. He said the fractures were serious, but still he hoped all would be right, However, the next day, a great deal of fever came on, and Jacques proposed to his father to send for the best doctor at Toulon. For that purpose, he wrote to Mdlle. de la Pinéde, to tell her of the

accident, and to beg her to despatch, as soon as possible, whomever was considered to be the ablest medical man in that town.

M. Dubois arrived as soon as could be expected, said the state of the Countess gave cause for anxiety, but that with care and skilful nursing she would recover. He recommended that they should at once procure an experienced nurse, and offered to remain himself at the chateau till she arrived.

Jacques again sent a messenger to Madame de Brissac's house with a letter, in which he implored Denise to secure, as quickly as possible, a skilful, devoted, sick nurse, repeating what M. Dubois had said—that his mother's life would most likely depend on the care with which she was watched for the next few days and nights, and the quiet and presence of mind of those about her.

In a very short time, the answer to his letter was brought back. It was as follows: "M. le Comte,—I know of no one in this town whom I could fully recommend to wait on your dear mother at this critical moment. We have not any Sœurs du bon Secours here—none but paid nurses, in whom I have little confidence. It seems presumptuous to offer myself, but M. Dubois will tell you that I am not an unskilful nurse; and I may venture to say that what care and attention can do will not be wanting on my part. I shall start in

an hour, and if my earnest prayers are heard, God will bless my efforts to be of use to one for whom I feel so much esteem and affection."

"God bless her," Jacques ejaculated; but turning to the doctor, who was in the room, he said in an anxious manner, "Mademoiselle de la Pinéde—it is so kind of her—offers to come and nurse my poor mother. I do not doubt her good-will, but she can have no experience."

"Has not she experience?" M. Dubois rejoined. "I am heartily glad of what you tell me. It is the very thing I could have wished. I have seen that young lady at work: a clearer head, a lighter hand, a more noiseless tread in a sick room, a more cheerful disposition, I have not met with in the whole course of my practice. I can tell you that you are lucky to have found such a nurse for Madame le Comtesse, and I shall go away easier about my patient now that Mademoiselle Denise will be here."

Little had the old Count and his sons thought to have seen Mdlle. de la Pinéde so soon again at the chateau, and it was strange to witness the effect her presence produced, when, scarcely two hours after her letter had reached Jacques, she arrived.

It seemed as if a mountain's weight had been lifted off the hearts of all in that house, as if they breathed more freely, and instinctively derived hope from the presence of that gentle, strong, bright-

looking creature, who really seemed, so George said to himself, to be an angel sent to their assistance.

When Jacques announced to his suffering mother the arrival of Denise, and her object in coming to La Pinéde, a faint colour rose in her cheeks, and she said "Thank God" with an energy which almost surprised her son. "The sight of her face did me good at once," she told the Count the next time he came into her room, after Mdlle. de la Pinéde had been with her. "I had been—I am ashamed to say—fretting because my illness would prevent those two from meeting, and now it has come about that it has actually brought her under our roof. Oh, something must come of it, I am sure."

Something was hereafter to come of it, but not just what poor Madame de Védelles expected.

"Mind," she said to her husband before he left her that afternoon, "mind that you insist upon it that she should have all her meals with you and our sons. She must not shut herself up in my sick room, and she should take a walk every day."

It was a peculiar life that began that day for the inhabitants of La Pinéde, a life that was to last about three weeks, and then be as if it had never been, except as to the traces it left in the hearts and secret thoughts of each of the de Védelles.

Denise coming amongst them was a little like

the effect produced in the drawing-room of that house when M. Lescalle had thrown open its windows, and let in air and sunshine.

The old Count had always wished for a daughter. He was—to use a French word—very *impressionable*, and though reserved and stern himself, gaiety had an irresistible charm for him. His wife had been the comfort of his life. She had taken away, as far as in her lay, every stone out of his path, smoothed his mental pillow from morning to night, studied every turn of his countenance, and reflected, in a softened and gentle form, the shades which had saddened his existence. As to his sons —of Jacques he was both proud and fond, but here had never been any intimacy between them, and he had become so early a complete man of the world, and took—even at nineteen or twenty—such a matter-of-fact view of men and things, that, in spite of his handsome face and lively manners, there was nothing really young about him, and by the time he was twenty-eight, his father often felt himself, in some respects, the more youthful of the two. He looked up to Jacques for advice in worldly matters, and leaned upon him in all that had to do with the practical side of life.

George, as we have already said, was several years younger than his brother. The Count and his wife had always longed to have a second child,

and though they would have liked better to have had a girl, his birth gave them great delight. As a little child, he had been delicate in health, and his mother, in consequence, had spoilt him, which made his father send him to school very early. He got on there extremely well, and made great progress in his studies. When he was about twelve years old, Madame de Védelles' father died in the island of Cuba, and it became necessary for her and her husband to go and look after the property which she inherited. They were to have been absent for fifteen months, but a law-suit with the Spanish Government detained them there five years. During all that time, the letters they received from France spoke of George's success at his college examinations, and the prizes he won on every occasion.

His masters always spoke of his excellent abilities and wonderful facility in learning. His parents were joyfully anticipating that at the time of their return, after those long five years of absence, he would be preparing for his examination at the Polytechnic School, and that they would arrive in time to enjoy the brilliant success with which he was sure to pass it. But just as they landed at Brest, in all the happy confidence that such would be the case, they found a letter, which informed them that George, exhausted by mental anxiety, superadded to the strain of the last few months' intense study,

had been seized with a brain fever, and was lying between life and death; the delicate organization he had inherited from his mother had given way under this fierce pressure.

The unhappy parents rushed into a post-chaise, and in forty hours were sitting by the bedside of their dying and unconscious son. For many days the case seemed utterly hopeless, and the eminent physicians who attended him said his recovery would be little short of a miracle. However, most unexpectedly, he did recover; but remained in a state of complete prostration, both of body and mind, so weak, that for months he could hardly stand or walk a step, and sunk into such apathy that nothing could arouse or interest him. The doctors predicted that his convalescence would be slow, but that all would be right in time; what he required, they said, was absolute rest and country air.

M. de Védelles settled at his own place, Valsec, in Lorraine, and with aching hearts the afflicted parents brought home the pale, languid, listless youth, for whom they had anticipated such a brilliant career. By very slow degrees, the bracing air, sitting out in the garden, and then riding, improved George's health, and his physical strength gradually returned; but the moral apathy remained the same He was either incapable of the slightest mental exertion or unwilling to make it, and it became

very difficult to say whether the condition of his brain really precluded work of any kind or whether a morbid discouragement had taken possession of him. He complained of frequent headache, was sensitively susceptible of the changes in the weather, irritably impatient of noise, wayward in temper, and inert in mood.

He had been spoilt as a child, and spoilt at school, by the perfect facility with which he had carried everything before him, and mastered, without effort, what to others were difficulties. His mother watched him with anxious affection, but she had no discernment of character, and never saw what was not obvious. His father at first kept observing every turn of his countenance, listened to each word he uttered, and devoted himself to him with a restless solicitude. But when nearly three years had elapsed and no change took place, he could hardly restrain the irritability and annoyance he felt at George's prolonged apathy and entire idleness, especially when his bodily health returned and he was able to ride for hours, and take long walks all over the country with or without a gun on his shoulder.

There was no doubt that George was by nature indolent, absent, and careless about many things. These defects had of course increased to an extraordinary degree since his illness. What had been

looked upon as mere originality in the bright a
clever boy of twelve, became intolerable in l
father's eyes, in the lazy, incapable, and, in momer
of bitterness, the Count internally added, the ha
witted youth, whom he was ashamed of, and wh
actual condition so painfully contrasted with t
bright promise of his childhood.

The more irritable his father became, the m
plainly he showed a sort of aversion to him, t
more George's silence, reserve, and apparent
difference to everything increased. Nothing p
voked the Count so much as to see him sitting
hours gazing on the sea, or at the clouds, or in t
evening at the stars, or if there was a fire in t
room at the blazing faggots and the sparks th
emitted.

He had a habit of scribbling on fragments
paper, and then tearing them up and throwi
them away, which provoked M. de Védelles, l
he seldom took the trouble of writing a lett
"It made his head ache," he said. Had his fat
been more kind, or had his mother been clever
or had his brother in the least understood
character, this state of things could not have exist
but as it was, there seemed little hope of a chan

The domestic life of the family had thus sett
into a groove which was fatal to the happiness
its members. Jacques' principal wish, in spite

his real affection for his mother, was to get away: for the others the future seemed sad enough.

It was therefore singularly refreshing to all when a new element was introduced into that home circle by Mdlle. de la Pinéde's presence. The Count was charmed with his young guest. How could it have been otherwise? He saw her skilful care, her watchful nursing, her sweet serenity, working a rapid improvement in his wife. She was soon pronounced out of danger; and, as far as her health was concerned, quickly became convalescent. Her only anxiety seemed lest she should get well too soon.

It was touching to see the little artifices she had recourse to in order to keep up the idea that her life depended on Denise's care. How they all leant upon this young girl, and what a strange influence she soon possessed over that father and those two sons, so different from one another, yet each of them feeling that there was something in her nobler, purer, and higher than they had ever before known! And with all that superiority of character and mind, she was so simple, so innocently gay, so femininely attractive.

The Count had never met with a woman at all like Denise de la Pinéde. He had known bad and good women, charming and disagreeable women, clever women and silly women, free-thinking women

and pious women; but never one who united so much enthusiasm with so much practical good sense, one so bold and fearless in defence of all she believed and honoured and loved, so uncompromising and yet so fair-minded, so just, so tolerant of difference of opinion in others, whilst so firm in her own convictions. He found pleasure in drawing her out. He provoked argument for the sake of hearing her speak in that peculiarly musical voice, which was one of her attractions, and watching the eloquent expression of her dark eyes. And then her mirth, so like the ripple of a stream, or a child's laugh, was wonderfully refreshing to the old man, who had lived so long alone with his gentle but saddened wife, whose gaiety he had crushed long ago and then unconsciously missed it, and his two sons, who for different reasons were not happy in their home. He was the most openly devoted of the three to Mdlle. de la Pinéde. He walked with her up and down the terrace during the short moments she could be induced to leave the Countess' sick-room, and after dinner detained her a little while in the drawing-room, and made her sing to him.

Jacques rapidly fell in love with Denise, and at the end of a week made up his mind to propose to her as soon as her stay at La Pinéde came to an end. He did not much doubt that she would

accept him, nor did it cross his mind that the dissimilarity of their ideas and feelings would prove an obstacle. He was under the impression, which at that time was prevalent in France, that religion, though superfluous for a man, was a sort of necessity for a woman of the better sort—for the sort of woman he should like to marry—he did not at all object to a pious wife. It did not occur to him that she would object to an unbelieving husband. He thought of her as the future young Comtesse de Védelles, who would make a great sensation in Paris, and do the honours of a *salon* where statesmen would congregate and men of letters flock. She had read a great deal, she was eloquent, she had wealthy relatives and distinguished connections. He could not imagine a more perfectly suitable *parti* for one who, like himself, had the desire and the ability to play a part in political and social life.

Denise was very amiable in her manner to him. She was naturally kind to every being that approached her—there was not a dog or a cat about the place to whom she did not say a good word as she passed by the kennel or the sunny wall on which puss was often seated. As to the children of the gardener and the shepherd, they watched for hours together in hopes that the beautiful lady who was staying at the chateau might stop before their

parents' cottages, pat them on the cheek, and give them *bonbons*, that necessity of life to French children.

One very bold urchin made his way one day to the terrace, and was looking up in hopes of seeing the bestower of *pralines* and *sucre de pomme* appear at a window. But instead of the face which he expected to see, a very pale and, it seemed to the child, very stern one looked down upon him, on which he began to cry and ran away. At the bottom of the steps leading down from the terrace, he suddenly came face to face with Mdlle. de la Pinéde, who sat down and took him on her knees to comfort him.

"What are you afraid of, little one?" she said, stroking his black hair with her soft white hand.

"I am afraid of the *fada*," he answered, hiding his face in her breast.

Denise was not acquainted with this Provençal word, and supposed it to mean a hobgoblin; but anxious to stop the child's crying, which she was afraid Madame de Védelles might overhear from her room, tried to lead him away. At that moment George appeared, carrying in his hand the box of toys which had remained in his room since the day of Denise's first visit.

"Oh, this is very opportune," she exclaimed,

and seizing on a hunter in a red coat and a sheep with a pink collar, she displayed them to the astonished eyes of little Pierre, who now looked at George with awe, but less terror than before. He evidently thought him still a very strange being, but not as evil-minded as he had supposed.

"Will you take him home, M. George," Denise said, "and let him carry away those treasures with him. But tell his parents to try and prevent his coming up to the terrace. Your father would have been very angry if he had heard him crying under the windows. I must go now to your mother."

George took the child's hand, and they walked towards the shepherd's hut; Pierre looking up at him now and then, half afraid and half confiding. When they reached the cottage, George told Madame Lubin what Denise had said and went away. She proceeded to scold Pierre for his audacity, and the better to secure his keeping away from the awful precincts, told him that if he ever trespassed again in the neighbourhood of the chateau, that gentleman who had brought him back, and who was a *fada*, would wring his neck just as she was at that moment going to do to the superannuated hen she held in her hand doomed to the *pot au feu*. After that day, Pierre's little companions, when they saw George walking on the road or on the seashore,

always ran away in a fright, screaming out, "The *fada*, the *fada!*"

We have said and shown that Denise was kind to every one, and to Jacques as to everybody else. And then she spoke to him sometimes in a very earnest manner. During the hours when she had sat by Madame de Védelles' bedside, the poor mother had spoken to her of her sorrow, that this eldest, bright, hopeful son of hers had lost the faith of his childhood, and ceased to practise his religion. At that time in France this was however so commonly the case with the young men of his age, that it appeared even to a pious mother no strange thing. She had lived for thirty years with a husband indifferent to religion, and surrounded by persons holding infidel opinions. This had blunted the edge of her grief with regard to her son, though it did not efface it; but Denise, whose character was stronger, whose zeal was more ardent, whose love of God was a deep, engrossing, supreme affection, could not look unmoved on what she felt to be a great calamity, she could not converse without emotion on subjects which related to the existence or the absence in a soul of that faith which was the mainspring of her whole being. So when she talked to Jacques of anything relating to it, when she watched the effect of her earnest words upon him, and like all earnest words they sometimes did

affect him, there was an expression in her countenance and a thrill in her voice which—poor vain man—he ascribed to a personal feeling of interest in him, Jacques de Védelles, not to the intense solicitude which one who has at heart the glory of God and the salvation of souls feels in every creature who is severed from the source of life and light, and the ardent desire to bring it back to a sense of its high destiny. He could not have conceived that the look of joy which beamed in her speaking eyes one day when he had uttered words which implied that he meant to think and act differently with regard to religion than he had hitherto done, could proceed from a disinterested anxiety for his salvation.

He would have believed it, perhaps, if he had ever followed Denise in the hospitals or in the homes of the poor. He would then have seen her beautiful face lighted up with the same exulting gratitude when some poor wretch, who had been cursing and blaspheming, perhaps, during the long course of a sinful and miserable life, with softened heart and tearful eyes, for the first time prayed or kissed the crucifix she held to his lips, or when a poor girl on the brink of sin and shame, saved by her tender energy, turned from the tempter and followed her to a place of safety.

It was natural he should cherish hopes founded

on a mistake and indulge in anticipations which reconciled him to her departure, for he felt that it was not during her stay at La Pinéde that he could propose to Denise; and that being the case, he almost longed for the day when she would return to Toulon, and he would feel at liberty to offer her his hand, which, to say the truth, he did not much doubt she would accept.

Madame de Védelles had unconsciously contrived to excite in Denise a strong interest in both her sons: in Jacques by speaking of him, by dwelling on his good qualities, and his talents, which had already begun to display themselves at the Bar, and then of that absence of faith and that sceptical spirit which enlisted against religion and the Church, capabilities which rightly directed might have made him, the poor mother fondly thought, a Montalembert, an Ozanam, or a Berryer.

As to George, she had been profoundly silent; but what with her compassionate tone when she spoke to him, his father's ill-disguised contempt, a few words which had been dropped by a servant, and also his absence, his oddities, and the wild anxious expression of his eyes at times, Denise had come to the conclusion that the name of *fada*, which she had heard applied to him, meant idiot, and that the poor young man was really half-witted. Still she had her doubts; these doubts led her to seek

for opportunities of conversing with him, and gradually her opinion on this point was shaken, and her curiosity strongly stimulated. Now and then George said things which astonished her by their originality and depth of thought, but he never kept up a conversation. He generally sat in a corner of the room where he could watch her unobserved, but hardly answered her questions or seemed to attend to what she said, unless they happened for a moment to be alone together, and then he was so agitated that he sometimes uttered incoherent things.

She felt very sorry for him, and had a suspicion that his relatives were altogether mistaken about this young man; but she did not venture with any of them to approach the subject. There seemed a sort of tacit agreement that in her presence George was not to be taken notice of, and they never mentioned him any more than if he had not existed. He did not seem conscious of this sort of moral ostracism, and went on leading much the same life as usual, sitting sometimes by his mother's couch, gentle, silent, and abstracted, only he remained more at home, and was often on the terrace whence he could see into the drawing-room where Denise spent part of the mornings busy with Church work. She had undertaken to make the altar linen for the little chapel which was to be used for Mass

as soon as the arrangements with the Bishop were concluded. When she read aloud, as she often did, to Madame de Védelles, he stood hid behind the open window listening.

Meanwhile the Countess recovered rapidly, and Denise, in spite of her entreaties that she would prolong her stay, fixed the day for her departure.

"But you will return for the opening of the chapel?"

"Perhaps, dear friend," Denise answered; "but I can make no promise."

As she looked up from her work, she saw George's eyes fixed upon her with an expression which startled her. It was one of entreaty, of deep sadness, of pathetic meaning.

"Do tell my mother that you will come back," he said in a low voice. "I have made a vow to our Lady of la Garde to do for you whatever you ask me if you will promise to come back for the opening of our chapel."

"What a rash vow!" Denise said, with a smile.

"Very rash," he said; "for I should keep it whatever it was."

Denise thought a moment, and revolved in her mind the hold which that singular promise might some day give her over that singular youth, whom she could not help feeling a deep interest in, and then she said gaily: "Well, if I can, I will."

"'I will,' means nothing," Madame de Védelles said, laughing, "with the proviso of *if I can.*"

"Would you have me promise to do something impossible?"

"Yes," George eagerly said. "I want you to do something impossible." He finished the sentence only in thought, and mentally added, "And that would be to care for me."

Denise was going away. She had been singing to the Count, for the last time, his favourite song *Al pié d'un Salice.* And then, the carriage being announced, she kissed the Countess, and was escorted to the door by M. de Védelles and Jacques. George was nowhere to be seen.

"How like him," the Count exclaimed; "not to be here to take leave of Mdlle. de la Pinéde." Then he thanked Denise for all she had done for his wife, and handed her into the carriage with a strong hope in his mind that she would be one day his daughter-in-law.

The *calêche* drove away. Where the while was George? Climbing up the Sugar-loaf hill, whence he could see for miles, amidst clouds of dust, that vehicle rolling along the road to Toulon.

The Count glanced at his eldest son, and saw that he looked troubled and excited, and thought it time to break silence on the subject which he felt sure was in both their minds.

He put his hand on Jacques' shoulder, and said, "What are you thinking of, Jacques?"

"What am I thinking of? Nothing that I know of, father——"

"But I do know, and I can tell you."

"What do you mean?"

"You are thinking of that charming girl who has just driven away."

"Well, I do not deny it."

"You admire her, you are in love with her?"

"I am not prepared to say No to that either."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Well, if you have no objection, I mean to propose to her."

"She would be a very suitable match for you, and she is certainly a very attractive person."

"Who are you speaking of?" asked the Countess, who had just been wheeled upon the terrace in her garden-chair.

When her attendant had withdrawn, her husband said, "Denise de la Pinéde."

"And what were you saying about her?"

"Jacques wants to propose to her."

"Oh, I am so glad. And you of course approve of it?"

"I cannot see any objection to such a marriage:

er family is just as good as ours, and she has a rtune of five hundred thousand francs."

"She is so *very* handsome," Madame de la edélles added, in her somewhat dejected tone of oice.

"Not too handsome, is she, mother?" Jacques id with a smile. "If you had said too religious, might, perhaps, have been inclined to agree with ou. But, no; I should not like her to be in any ay different from what she is. I believe I should ot have lost my heart half so quickly to her if she ad not been bent on converting me."

"Oh, Jacques, you will indeed be a happy ian if you marry Denise!"

Jacques hugged his mother, as he used to do hen he was eight years old, and then his old ather. Rushing into the house, he shouted, "Vinent, order my horse immediately."

"Where are you going?" asked the Count.

"To Toulon."

"Not to-day?"

"Yes, to-day. I shall sleep at the Grand Cerf, nd call at Madame de Brissac's to-morrow morning. The first year of Denise's mourning for her ather ends to-morrow. She will see that out of espect for her feelings, I waited till that day to ropose to her."

"Well, be off, my dear boy, and God speed you on your errand," his father said; and his mother added, "God bless you, my dear son."

At about two o'clock the next day Jacques rode up the avenue, his horse in a sweat, and his clothes white with dust. He looked pale and jaded.

"What has happened?" his mother anxiously asked, as he came into the drawing-room, where she and her husband were sitting.

"Something we did not foresee, mother."

"What?"

"She has refused me."

"Refused you!" Madame de Védelles exclaimed.

"Yes, without hesitation, and without agitation. I spoke of hope, and she said there was no hope. She was as calm, as kind, as decided as when the other evening she refused to sing the *Fou de Tolède*, the song I had bought at Marseilles."

"This is a sad disappointment," Madame de Védelles sighed, with tears in her eyes.

The Count cleared his throat, and took up the newspaper; but laying it down again, looked at his son, and in a husky voice said, "You will not break your heart about her, Jacques?"

"Oh, dear, no; I shall not die of it, nor even

ıake a vow never to marry. I did not expect › have ever been so sentimental; but nothing ıres one so quickly of that infirmity as the cold ıower-bath of such an absolute and civilly gracious ɜfusal. I shall go to Paris in a few days."

CHAPTER VII.

COMPLICATIONS.

SEVERAL days elapsed, and no one at the chateau made any illusion to Denise. Jacques found it hard work to get over his disappointment, and longed for the moment of departure. George, to whom not a word had been said of what had been going on, was, as usual, silent. The old Count, almost as vexed as his son at the result of the journey to Toulon, took refuge in politics, and held long conversations with Jacques about his prospects at the approaching elections.

A request had been made to him to stand for the department, M. Césaire de Croixfonds, who was to have done so, having apparently been unable to buy a property which would have made him eligible. This incident happened luckily at the very moment when the thoughts of father and son were particularly prepared to indulge in ambitious projects, and day after day they had gone through calculations in the morning, and in the afternoon paid visits in the neighbourhood, in order to feel their ground and sound the dispositions of the electors.

The result of their investigations showed that parties were very evenly balanced, and, as the Baron de Croixfonds had also discovered, that M. Lescalle's influence, and the votes he could command, would probably turn the scale one way or the other.

"Would he be well disposed towards us?" Jacques asked his father.

"I really cannot tell. He had given the Baron de Croixfonds great hopes that he would support his son in case of his standing, but somebody said the other day that he has thrown him over, and is hand and glove now with the Richers de Montlouis. M. Jules Richer is the ultra-Liberal candidate, you know."

"I had better call on Madame Lescalle, and try to obtain her good graces."

"I suspect that she has not much influence with her lord and master, that is to say, she rules the *ménage*, but when it comes to business, or politics, he is absolute."

"How can we get round him?"

"We can ask him to dinner before you go, and judge of his dispositions."

"In the mean time I shall leave my card at the Maison Lescalle. Such little attentions are never wholly unacceptable."

On the afternoon of the same day, as he was returning from La Ciotat, Jacques met his brother,

and was struck with his paleness and look of more than ordinary dejection.

"Are you ill, George?" he said, in a kind manner.

"What makes you think so?"

"You don't look at all well."

"Oh, I am quite well. There is nothing the matter with me."

"I am not at all convinced of that. I have observed that for some days you have looked anything but well. You must take care of yourself, George."

"Oh! I shall take a long walk to-morrow, that does me more good than anything when——"

"When you feel ill. What is the matter with you?"

George hesitated and seemed about to answer, but he stopped, turned away, and, as if speaking to himself, said, "Oh, these last twelve days!"

Those words struck Jacques. It was just twelve days since his own unsuccessful journey to Toulon. As his brother walked away, he looked at him in a thoughtful and anxious manner, then went out himself, and for nearly an hour paced slowly up and down the avenue. At last he stopped, and, as if he was making up his mind to an effort, came back to the house and walked straight into his father's study.

The Count de Védelles was writing, and said, without looking up, "What do you want, Jacques?"

"I want to speak to you about something which is, I think, of consequence."

"About your election?"

"No; it is about George."

"Oh, George again!" the old man said, with a look of weariness. "Well, what is it?"

"He is not well, and if we do not take care, he will get worse, both in body and mind. I suspect he spends his nights wandering about the grounds. I found out accidentally that he had not gone to bed at all the night before last."

M. de Védelles made a gesture which meant, "Why was I not told of this before?"

"I did not speak about it, because I knew how much it must vex you, and then, as I could not imagine any reason, or think of any remedy for this increasing depression, I thought it better not to thwart his fancies. But I am getting anxious about him. He is looking very ill, he has lost his appetite, he is more silent and abstracted than ever, and sometimes his absence is so great that I can hardly rouse him from it."

"My dear Jacques, all this is not new to me. Your mother has noticed it as well as yourself, and it makes her very unhappy. But what can we do? We have tried everything we could think of to rouse

him out of his apathy. I am afraid there is nothing to be done. Speaking to him about his health only serves to irritate him."

"But I think I have found out the cause of this increased dejection."

"Have you? What is it?"

"He is in love."

"In love! George! Oh, then that would explain those long walks and wanderings about the country! And you have found out the secret, you know who it is he has taken a fancy to. A peasant girl, I suppose—one of the farmers' daughters?"

"No; not at all a peasant girl!"

"Some one at La Ciotat, then? That would be better. If she is a respectable girl and tolerably well connected, why really it would be no bad thing to get him married. I have often thought that as there is no hope of his entering into any profession, this would be the best thing that could happen."

"But unfortunately it is Mdlle. de la Pinéde he has fallen in love with."

"Denise! Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it!"

"But I am quite certain it is so. I suspected it, and just now something he said, half unconsciously, proved I am right."

"Then I don't see what is to be done. She would certainly not marry him."

"No, indeed," Jacques said, glancing at his own handsome face in the glass. "A girl who has refused me, would not, I suppose, think of marrying George. But what can we do about this poor dear boy?"

"You think much too seriously, I am sure, of this fancy of his. Well, suppose he imagines himself in love with Mdlle. Denise, it is only because she is the first pretty girl he has met and talked to. We could easily, if he has taken a sentimental turn, lead his affections in some other more possible direction. The fact is, he is bored to death. Without occupation of any sort, without interest in anything, his life here is of course dreadfully dull. He will never be able to take care of himself; and a good, sensible wife, pretty enough to please his fancy, would be the making of your brother. Do you know that this idea is quite a relief to me? Can you think of any one that would do for him? We must not be too particular. People in our own rank of life would object to marry their daughters to such a poor creature as George, considering he is no great *parti*, and will never get on in life. But what I can settle upon him, and the title of Baronne, would throw dust into the eyes of many an honest *roturier*."

Jacques reflected a moment, and then a smile hovered on his lips. "O father, what a capital stroke of policy for both your sons I have thought of."

"What *are* you thinking of?"

"Suppose that with one stone you could k two 'birds.'"

"What two birds? Speak out."

"Well, you know that M. Lescalle holds t fate of the next election completely in his han This is the case, beyond a doubt. He has be up to this time, playing off the Croixfonds and t Richers against one another. Now it appears tl Césaire de Croixfonds is out of the field, and t choice lies between M. Richer and me. Wou not the excellent Toussaint like his pretty daugh to be Madame la Baronne de Védelles? and y would really have a very nice little daughter-in-law

"I wonder if he would agree to it," the Cou said, greatly excited. "Of course it would secu your election at once. The joke in the neighbou hood has been that the representation of tl department is a part of Mdlle. Rose's marria portion, and we could go much further and fa worse. The parents would be a great nuisance, b the girl is nice enough."

"She is a charming little thing. Let us lo no time about it. That gigantic swell, M. Artém Richer de Montlouis, is said to be very much fa cinated by the notary's daughter, and they m engage themselves beyond recovery if speedy me sures to cut him out are not taken."

"I shall write at once to Lescalle and ask him to come here to-morrow. He wants the East Farm for a client of his, and I shall put our friend in a good humour by telling him that I have made up my mind, for his sake, to let Jean Bénard have it."

"Bravo! I already see myself M. le Député des Bouches du Rhone, and my pretty sister-in-law installed at the chateau. We shall then see, I suppose, the acacia branch cut at last. Poor, dear George! It is really a capital plan, if only he falls into it."

"Of course he will," the Count answered. "We shall have to tell him that Mdlle. Denise is as much out of his reach as the moon, and once convinced of that, he will be enchanted to fall back on the fair Rose. We shall have provided for him. You had better not say anything of all this to your mother at present, she is over-anxious about things."

To the disappointment of the Count and his eldest son, an answer was sent to say that M. Lescalle was absent, and not expected home for some days. Jacques put off again his departure for Paris, wishing to keep up his father to the plan they had formed, and to see the affair fairly started. In the mean time he was assiduous in his attentions to those he looked upon as his future constituents, and made himself very popular in the neighbourhood.

George looked every day more sad and dejected. There had been no communication between Madame de Védelles and Mdlle. de la Pinéde since she had refused Jacques; but four or five days after the one when he had spoken to his father of George's state of mind, the Countess received a letter from Denise, inclosing one from the Vicar-General, announcing that a second priest had been appointed at Les Trois Tours, and would begin saying Mass every day at the chapel in the grounds of La Pinéde, as soon as he received notice of M. and Madame de Védelles' wishes on the subject. Denise had informed the Vicar-General that the Countess would answer his letter herself. She added kind and affectionate expressions as to the health of Madame de Védelles, but said nothing as to their meeting again.

The last day of the month of May was fixed upon for the opening of the chapel. It was to be a very simple function. There had been plans for the formation of a choir under Denise's direction, and the music for the occasion had been chosen during her stay at La Pinéde. But all this having fallen to the ground since her departure and the unfortunate result of Jacques' visit on the following day, there was now to be only a Low Mass at eight o'clock in the morning. A box containing all the things she had worked for the altar, and another with all those she had ordered, at Madame de

Védelles' request, from a shop at Marseilles, arrived the day before that of the opening.

George seemed excited at the sight of these cases, and when his mother went to the chapel to see them unpacked and arranged, and to meet the young priest from Les Trois Tours, he followed her there, and exerted himself, more than he had done about anything since his illness, in helping to ornament the altar.

On the following morning Madame de Védelles, in her Bath chair, and her husband and her eldest son on foot, crossed the garden and entered the chapel. The Count went because it would not have looked well in the eyes of his servants and tenants if he had not done so; Jacques, because he did not like to vex his mother by staying away. George had preceded the rest of the family, and when they arrived was sitting on one of the benches with his head leaning on his hands. When Mass began he knelt, but otherwise remained in the same position. Once, just after the Elevation, he raised his head, and then, in a little tribune on one side of the chapel, which was reached by a side entrance, he caught sight of a face which at that moment, and to his excited imagination, seemed a heavenly vision. The expression of devotion in that upturned countenance was more holy, more beautiful than anything he had ever seen or dreamed of.

It was the face indeed which, from the first moment he had beheld it, he had thought the most perfect ideal of pure, high, and lofty womanly beauty. But never had it seemed to him, during those many hours he had watched it, not even when it bent in gentle sweetness over his mother's sick couch, half so beautiful or so angel-like as now, in the attitude of ardent prayer and adoring love. So holy was its look that it impressed him with a feeling of awe. He dared not continue to gaze upon it in that Sacred Presence he had always believed in, but which that expression of fervent adoration seemed to impress upon him more vividly than ever. He again covered his face with his hands, a mute, silent, instinctive prayer rose from his heart, which softened the dull, aching pain so long felt and never spoken of.

When Mass was over he glanced again at the tribune, but it was empty, and he asked himself if he had imagined or seen a vision, whether Denise had really been in that spot a moment ago, or if it had been a mere illusion.

He walked home like a person in a dream, and never uttered a single word during breakfast-time, and when his father and his brother had left the room, sat opposite to his mother, still plunged in a deep fit of musing.

"George," she gently said, "I have a message to give you."

"A message?" he said, "I cannot think who ın have any message to send to me."

"I have just been given a letter from Mdlle. de . Pinéde."

A hectic red spot rose on George's pale cheeks.

"She was in the chapel this morning. She ıys that she had promised us to be present at the rst Mass that should be said there, and that ıough, at present, it is better for all parties that ıe should not come here, as of course it is, she felt ıat she must keep her word, and that with all her eart she united her prayers with ours; and then he adds, 'Will you tell M. George that I have ept my promise, and that I may some day claim he fulfilment of his.'"

"Mother, what does it all mean?" George xclaimed, starting to his feet. "What has hapıened? What is changed? Why does she stay way?"

Madame de Védelles hesitated a moment, and hen thought it better to let him know the truth.

"My dear boy, if you had not been so absent, o unobservant, you would have guessed what has aken place. Your brother fell in love with Mdlle. le la Pinéde, and the day after she left us went to Toulon and proposed to her. I am sorry to say hat she refused him. It was a great disappointnent to him and to us."

"Jacques? She refused him? Thank God!" he added in so low a voice that his mother did not hear those last words. "And she has sent me that message. She remembers my vow."

He darted out of the room, and rushed through the olive woods to the sea-shore. His head was aching with excitement, and during the rest of the day he could only sit with his forehead resting on his hands, or walk up and down the beach, repeating to himself, "She has refused Jacques. She has sent me that message."

It was a day or two after the opening of the chapel that M. Lescalle came back to La Ciotat, and he lost no time in obeying the Count's summons, which he found on his arrival. But between that arrival and his visit to the chateau, short as the interval had been, something had happened which made him look singularly radiant. Pleasant thoughts were evidently in his mind, and he kept rubbing his fat hands together every five minutes, as if to relieve the overflowing exuberance of his spirits.

The fact was, that an hour after his return he had received a visit from M. Richer de Montlouis, the father of M. Artémon, and that after a few preliminary remarks that gentleman had said to him—

"M. Lescalle, my object in calling upon you is

ı important one. I come to ask your daughter's and in marriage for my son Artémon."

The notary rather expected this proposal, but e thought it right to appear surprised.

"How comes it," he said, "that such an honour ı done to us by the first family in the town?"

"For the best reason possible in such a case, I. Lescalle. Artémon could not meet your lovely aughter and remain indifferent to her great at-actions. She has made the deepest impression on ıy son's heart, and you will make him the happiest f men if you accept him as a son-in-law."

"Rose is very young, M. de Montlouis."

"That is a defect which will always go on iminishing," the banker said, with a broad smile.

"I am afraid the fortune I can give her will ɜem to you very small."

"You give her——"

"Forty thousand francs."

"I had been told sixty thousand francs."

"No, M. de Montlouis, forty thousand; and I ɜsure you that even that is almost beyond my ıeans."

"Well, you will perhaps reconsider the matter efore we finally fix the sum, my dear M. Lescalle. do not want you to give me a positive answer at nce, not to-day I mean. You must wish, of course,) consult Madame Lescalle, only I flatter myself

that if you are friendly to us there will be no difficulties in the way."

"You have no doubt, I hope, of my friendly feelings?"

"Well, well, my dear M. Lescalle, you have not always been our friend."

"What do you mean, my dear sir?"

"Come, let us speak openly. We are on the eve of an election. My brother is going to stand, and you know that you promised to support M. Césaire de Croixfonds."

"Ah! I thought as much," inwardly ejaculated the notary. "The election is at the bottom of the marriage, to a great degree, at any rate."

"What I promised," he answered, "was to help M. de Croixfonds to qualify himself by the purchase of an estate in this part of the country."

"Yes, exactly so, to set up another candidate. Thanks to your good offices, he was very near purchasing La Pinéde for a song."

"I acted as his lawyer and a friend of his family. I have no wish to injure your brother's position."

"But if we come to an agreement regarding this proposal I have just made to you, I suppose that in the event of any one else standing we can reckon on your support?"

"I am not pledged to any one else."

"Then I can solicit your votes for my son's ncle. On another occasion you will give them of ɔu own accord to your son-in-law."

"What does your son intend——?"

"Artémon has no settled plans of the kind; ut seeing that for the last ten years he has set his ıce against marriage, and now has completely given ı, I have no doubt it will be the same as to his ıreer. I am sure that as a married man he will ɜ a model of steadiness."

"It is never too late to mend, certainly, but I ıppose there is room for improvement," M. Lescalle ıid.

"Oh, of course, he has been a little wild, like l young men. There is no harm in that. He has ɔwn his wild oats. You were just as unsteady ıce, and only think what an excellent husband you ave made."

M. Lescalle did not much like this allusion to is past life; but as it was a home thrust that ɔuld not well be parried, he thought it best to drop ıe subject, and the two gentlemen parted on the ıost cordial terms.

As soon as M. de Montlouis was gone, M. escalle rushed to his wife's room.

"Virginie," he said, "we are going to marry ose."

"To Artémon Richer?"

"Then it is no surprise to you?"

"I saw his father going into your office, and I immediately guessed what he was come about. I knew it would end in that way."

"I suspect that their anxiety about the election and securing my votes hurried on the proposal. I shall not think of giving them more than forty thousand francs with Rose; it is quite enough, considering that it will be my doing if M. Jules Richer is elected."

"Oh, certainly, it is quite enough, and Rose such a pretty girl, too, in the bargain."

"Very pretty, no doubt; but I can tell you, Madame Lescalle, that her blue eyes would not have made up for the loss of twenty thousand francs, if it had not been for the votes I can command."

"Artémon is very much in love with her."

"So much the better. And Rose—has she seen him?"

"I don't know; I have looked after her very closely. M. Artémon is apt to flirt with young ladies, and I was determined that nothing of the sort should go on till he had proposed."

"You were quite right, but now you can speak to Rose. Do you think she will be pleased?"

"I should fancy so, indeed—such a tall, handsome fellow, and so admired by everybody. There she is, Toussaint, just come back from Les Capucins.

ıe has spent the morning with Aunt Médé. Leave ; together. I shall speak to her at once. It would ɜ too formal if you were in the room."

"Very well," M. Lescalle answered, and away ɜ went to his office.

A moment afterwards Rose came into her ıother's room. She looked like one of Greuze's ictures in her large straw hat, ornamented with a reath of wild flowers; her pretty soft hands and rms holding up the skirt of her pink gingham ock, which enabled her to carry an immense bunch f flowers gathered in Misé Médé's garden. With er fair hair hanging about her face, the colour in er cheeks deeper still than usual after her walk, nd that harvest of roses, no painter could have ketched a more perfect image of spring. Breathess and smiling, she ran up to her mother and issed her.

"See, mamma, what lovely flowers! I have ansacked Aunt Médé's *parterre*."

"They are beautiful," Madame Lescalle anwered, glancing at the roses, "but I am not thinkıg of nosegays now. Can you guess what I have eard?"

"No; what is it, mamma?"

"Some one has proposed for you, my dear."

"For me—really? Who, mamma?"

"Can you guess?"

"No, mamma," Rose answered, opening very wide her large blue, innocent-looking eyes.

"Well, Artémon Richer de Montlouis wishes to marry you."

Rose's countenance changed, her hands loosened their hold of her gown, and all her flowers fell at her feet.

"You said the other day, mamma, that I was too young to be married."

"Your father does not think so."

"Are you speaking quite in earnest about it, mamma?"

"Oh, yes, my dear, as earnestly as possible."

"But, mamma, you did say, the day before yesterday, that I was a great deal too young to be married."

"Oh, that is what one always says when there is nothing actually in question about a girl's marriage, and no one has yet proposed for her; but people do not throw away the chance of a good match on the score of a person's youth. You are very difficult to please if you are not delighted with this proposal. Artémon Richer is the best *parti* and the handsomest man in this place."

Rose said nothing. She knew her mother's partiality for the handsome Artémon, and felt that nothing she could say would be understood. She sat silently listening to Madame Lescalle's com-

ments on her extraordinary good luck till some visitors were announced; then hastily rising, she threw her hat covered with flowers into a corner, and went straight to her father's study. She found him seated at his bureau, with his head leaning on his hand. He was calculating all the advantages he expected to derive from a connection with the Richers de Montlouis.

Rose tried to steady her voice, and said, "Dear papa, mamma has just told me——"

"Oh, indeed! So you have heard, little girl, of the conquest you have made. Well, it is of some use to be pretty."

"And so M. Artémon——"

"Will be your husband, little lady, in three weeks."

"Not so soon as that, papa, I hope. I don't know him at all."

"Well, I know him, my dear, and that is quite enough. You and he will have plenty of time to get acquainted when you are married. But you have seen him; you know what a good-looking fellow he is. That will do for the present, and I suppose he admires my little Rose as he has proposed for her."

"Perhaps it is his father who wants him to marry me."

"Oh dear, no, Rosette; a man of thirty is not like a girl of seventeen."

Rose sighed deeply, and her father went on saying: "I would not on any account have forced upon my daughter a disagreeable husband; and if Artémon had not been good-looking and young, rich and well-connected, if he had not been just the sort of man a girl would like to marry, I should not have accepted him for my little Rose; but this match is everything I could desire. What! are you not delighted, my love? Why don't you thank your papa and kiss him, instead of standing there looking as doleful as if you were not the luckiest of girls?"

"I am so surprised, papa, and I really hardly know if I am awake or dreaming. The idea of my being married seems so strange—and so soon, too! I had never thought about it at all."

"It is much better to be taken by surprise, I can tell you, than to be ten years looking out for a husband, as the Demoiselles Arnoux have done, and end by not finding one and being an old maid. I can understand your surprise, Rosette; but after Artémon's first visit you will be enchanted."

"Oh no, papa, I am sure I shall not like him;" and in saying this Rose, who had been struggling for some time with her tears, hid her face in her hands, and began to sob.

"What is all this nonsense?" M. Lescalle sternly said. "Are we going to play the fool and turn our back on the best match in the neighbourhood? Oh, I see how it is. We dreamed at school of some fine fairy prince, and we mean to wait for him."

This sort of banter Rose could not stand. All she had meant to say went out of her head. She felt herself helpless against what she felt would be her father's invincible will, and her courage gave way. She rushed out of the study and locked herself up in her room, without listening to her father's consoling assurance that she was to leave it to him, and that he knew much better than herself what would be for her happiness.

As might well have been expected, Rose's tears did not in the least affect his plans. He did not make her girlish objections even a subject of thought; and as he went the next day to La Pinéde, Toussaint Lescalle felt in a most agreeable frame of mind.

Any one who had seen him walking slowly, with his hands behind his back, enjoying the pleasant breeze from the sea and the perfume of the wild thyme, and had observed the affable way in which he nodded to the persons he met, smiled on the children, and called the dogs by familiar names, would have said, "There goes a happy individual."

And what was giving such joy to that man, that it seemed to ooze out of every pore of his comfortable plump body, and to glitter in his little sharp eyes?

Well, he had an only child—a lovely, innocent girl, full of the gaiety which is so attractive at that age. He had her in his home, under his roof, near him from morning to night, like a bird in spirits, like a flower in beauty and sweetness; and what made him so very happy was that he was going to get rid of her.

Was he on that account a hard-hearted man or a bad father? By no means. He was like an innumerable number of fathers. In many families a daughter is considered as an inconvenience. If she marries at eighteen it is a good thing; if at sixteen or seventeen, still better. To see her unhappy in her husband's house is much less of an annoyance than to have her happy at home unmarried.

CHAPTER VIII.

SECOND THOUGHTS.

M. DE VÉDELLES was immediately struck with his visitor's beaming expression of countenance, and something in it which seemed to provoke an interrogatory remark.

After requesting him to be seated, the Count said, "You seem in excellent spirits this morning, M. Lescalle?"

"Ah, well! I am not at all apt to be melancholy, M. le Comte, and I have indeed no reason to complain. Things are not going badly with me, as times go."

"Your business is increasing very much, I hear."

"It increases every day, and I have clients in every corner of the department."

"Yes; your acquaintance must be very extensive. I suppose you know most of the families in this neighbourhood?"

"A great many of them—not to say all."

"You saw by my letter, that I will agree to let

the East Farm, at his own terms, to your prétegé, Jean Bénard."

"Indeed I did, M. le Comte, and I am delighted to find that you have arrived at this decision. I have known Bénard for twenty years, and I can assure you that he is a good sort of man, and a good farmer too. He will do justice to your land."

"I am always inclined to take your advice on such matters, because you have so much knowledge of business, and are especially conversant with questions of land in this locality, of which I am myself quite ignorant."

"Without boasting, I may say, M. le Comte, that few men have applied themselves with as much attention as I have done to all the details regarding the management of property in this part of the country."

"But I suspect, M. Lescalle, that you are not only experienced in matters of this description, but that you have a pretty quick eye as to all sorts of affairs, and that you could give me judicious advice on a very delicate matter."

"Well, M. le Comte, I will not deny that I am often consulted by my neighbours on subjects which require considerable tact and discretion."

"That is just what I meant. You are a person to whom one can speak quite confidentially."

"I always go on the principle that a notary is a sort of lay confessor."

"I felt sure that was the case, and I am going to speak to you with entire confidence. You know that I have two sons?"

"Yes; though I only know M. Jacques—a very charming young man in every respect."

"He is also remarkably clever, and has already distinguished himself at the Bar. They are trying at Marseilles to persuade him to give up Paris and remain in Provence. He is thinking of engaging in political life, and I have no fears as to his not making his way in the world; but it is not the same case with his brother."

"You are alluding to M. George?"

"Yes."

"He is still very young?"

"Not so young as he looks. He will be twenty-one in a few days. He was, till the age of seventeen, one of the most promising boys imaginable—full of intelligence, and even, apparently, very talented."

"Oh, indeed! then he has not always been——"

"Deficient in mind, you were going to say. On the contrary, it is only since a brain fever, followed by a typhoid fever, which seized him during his preparation for his examination at the Polytechnic School, that he has fallen into a state

of mind which it is difficult to define. As far as health goes, he is well and strong enough now. George is by no means an idiot. He has quite as much sense as many a one who gets on creditably in a quiet and obscure position. If he had not once given promise of superior intellect, his present deficiencies would not strike us so much. He has lost the power, and even the desire, of exertion, and I see no prospect of his being able to follow any profession, or of his doing anything for himself. I feel obliged—and his brother quite agrees with me—to think of his future existence, and to form some plan with regard to it."

"And what are your ideas on the subject, M. le Comte?"

"Well, really the only thing I can think of, is to find him a wife, and to let him live quietly in the country—either with us, or in a little home of his own in this neighbourhood. He is passionately fond of the country and the seaside—that is really the only taste he seems to have. My wife's health is in a precarious state. I am getting old myself, and I feel that it would be a great relief and comfort to us if our son was married to an amiable and well-principled girl, who would supply to him our place, and who could make herself happy in a quiet existence, and with a man who would be to her, I am sure, a very kind and affectionate husband."

M. Lescalle was listening intently to the Count's words, and busy thoughts were crossing his mind. "What has he in his thoughts?" he said to himself, and then aloud—

"I should think there would be no difficulty in finding a young lady such as you describe, M. le Comte."

"Well! could you suggest any one?"

"I ought to know, first, what would be your stipulations with regard to this daughter-in-law."

"I should not be very exacting."

"Must she be of noble birth?"

"I do not hold to it. A man gives his own name to his wife."

"And the title of Baronne?" M. Lescalle observed.

"Of course. It is quite a different case with daughters."

"And as to fortune?"

"As to fortune, I should settle on George and his wife twenty-five thousand francs a year, and if the girl had thirty thousand or forty thousand francs of her own, which could be hardly reckoned a dowry—"

"I beg your pardon, M. le Comte. In our part of the country, such a sum is reckoned a very good marriage portion. But as to the position of her family?"

"All I should care about would be its respectability—not tradespeople, however."

"And the age of the young lady?"

"Oh, anywhere between sixteen and twenty-five. She ought to be good-looking—pretty, if possible, in order that George might take a fancy to her."

"Let me think," M. Lescalle said, musing as if he was turning over in his mind all the young ladies in the neighbourhood. "There is Mdlle. Veslaint, but she is sickly."

"Oh, that would never do."

"Mdlle. Laurisse is pretty enough, but as she has a hundred thousand francs, I scarcely think—"

"That she would accept George."

"Mdlle. du Lac is young and well born, but then—"

"What then?"

"She is humpbacked."

"He would demur at that."

"What would you say to the postmaster's daughter?"

"That would be too great a *mésalliance*."

"M. le Cure has a handsomish niece, but she is forty at the least."

"Almost double his age! Is there nobody else?"

"Well, M. le Comte, I really cannot think of any one else."

"Oh, I am sure you will, if you try. If I could meet with something really suitable, I should not mind adding to what I settle on George and his wife, ten thousand francs for the *corbeille*."

The notary reflected for a few instants, and then said, slapping his forehead, "A thought just occurs to me——"

"What?" the Count anxiously asked.

"There is my own daughter."

"Mdlle. Rose?"

"Yes."

"I thought she was engaged to a young man of La Ciotat."

"Artémon Richer, you mean? There has been some question of it, but I must say I should prefer the connection with your family. There would be, however, a difficulty, even if you thought my daughter a desirable match for your son."

"I certainly should think so. There would be no obstacle on our side."

"But then you see, M. le Comte," and M. Lescalle hesitated, like a man who has something awkward to bring out. "The fact is, that Rose has not got any fortune at all."

"But you could, if you wished it, do something for us that would quite make up for her want of fortune."

"How so, M. le Comte?"

"By supporting, and consequently securing, the election of my son Jacques."

"I thought as much," M. Lescalle inwardly ejaculated. "They are all possessed with the same devil."

The Count went on. "There are two candidates, I know—that is, if M. Césaire de Croixfonds is still in the field. We were told he had retired, but——"

"He now hopes to purchase l'Estraine, which would make him eligible."

"Would not a third candidate, well supported by influential parties, and with a decided talent for speaking, carry the election?"

"It is not unlikely. But I hardly know how I could support M. Jacques, seeing the encouragement I have given——"

"Oh, you cannot have any scruples on the subject. If we arrange the marriage, Jacques' success will become, in your case, a family concern."

"Well, there is truth in what you say, M. le Comte, and I am quite ready to further his interests. How old is M. Jacques?"

"He will soon be thirty; and to get him into the Chamber this year will be an immense advantage. It is worth two years to him."

"I quite see that, and you can rely upon me. I shall be happy to use my influence in his favour;

and as to my daughter, I assure you that I am highly flattered at your wish to have her for a daughter-in-law."

The two fathers shook hands, and then M. Lescalle said, "Your young man is not ill-tempered, I hope?"

"Oh dear, no. He has never in his life said an unkind word to any one. It is possible that his wife may not find him a very amusing companion, but he is sure to behave well to her."

"Ah, well, then it is all right. I would not on any account give my daughter to a man who would make her unhappy."

The Count and the notary walked out of the house, and down the steps of the terrace, arm-in-arm, like old friends, to the great surprise of Vincent, who was not used to see his master on such intimate terms with persons of inferior rank.

M. de Védelles accompanied M. Lescalle to the gate of the chateau. The last words that passed between them before they separated, were these—"He has never opposed my will." The Count was speaking of George.

"She would never dream of disobeying me," the notary said, alluding to Rose.

CHAPTER IX.

A TRIFLING OBSTACLE.

THE day on which this important conversation had taken place was a Sunday. At eleven the notary had set out for La Pinéde, and at the same time his wife and daughter had gone to church. It was one of the finest days of a beautiful spring. The abundant and unusual quantity of rain which had fallen in the early part of the year, had made Provence as green as Normandy and as fragrant as Spain. La Ciotat had never been in such beauty before. The altar of the Blessed Virgin in the parish church was so surrounded by a mass of lilacs and orange blossoms, that the perfume of the flowers exceeded that of the incense.

After Mass all the population flocked to the Tasse, a charming promenade on a terrace near the sea. A number of pretty girls in short petticoats, and youths with red fisherman's caps on their heads, were strolling up and down in parties of seven or eight, shaking hands and laughing as they stopped to speak to their friends.

Some of the consequential families of the town were walking more sedately in the midst of that animated, picturesque, and noisy crowd. Amongst the rest M. le Baron de Croixfonds and his family, M. Arnoux and his two daughters in very stiff muslin gowns, M. Richer de Montlouis arm-in-arm with his wife, and Madame Lescalle and Rose, escorted by M. Artémon Richer.

At La Ciotat, as in all small towns, the least little events assume a great magnitude. Everything is made the subject of comments and conjectures. Acts which in Paris no one would take the least notice of, are immediately remarked, and give rise to all kinds of suppositions. It was accordingly a matter of great astonishment to the big-wigs of La Ciotat when Madame and Mademoiselle Lescalle were seen walking with M. Artémon Richer.

We must describe Artémon. He was a tall fellow, almost six feet high, broad in proportion, with a brown and florid complexion, and dark hair. His features were symmetrical and heavy, his countenance impudent, vulgar, and good-humoured. He was always laughing and showing a row of fine white teeth. His dress was in the worst possible taste. He wore diamond studs in his shirt, had large, red, ungloved hands, and was the very type of a Provençal swell—to use a slang word.

An overbearing, noisy, cynical, insolent, dashing fellow, who carried all before him in the little town of La Ciotat. Rich, handsome, and connected as he was with some of the best families in the neighbourhood, nobody ventured to discountenance him. Laughing at everybody and everything, with no deference for any one, smoking in the presence of the finest ladies of his acquaintance, coarse in conversation, and familiar in his way of talking to women and girls, he was, in spite of all this, or perhaps in consequence of it, rather a favourite in the society he frequented, and supposed to have broken the heart of more than one young lady who had fondly and vainly hoped to become Madame Artémon Richer.

After spending some years in Paris on the very specious pretext of studying for the Bar, he had returned to La Ciotat, leaving behind him debts to the amount of thirty thousand francs, which his father had paid, stipulating however that there was to be an end to his residence in Paris, so he was obliged to find amusement in a small country town and its vicinity. For some time father Richer laughed at the quarrels, the scrapes, the flirtations, and the follies of his incorrigible son, but at last he became anxious to get him married. Several attempts of the kind had utterly failed. However, from the first day he had seen Rose Lescalle,

Artémon had taken a great fancy to her, and her coldness and reserve only made him the more obstinately bent on marrying the notary's pretty daughter.

His father, as we have seen, hastened to take advantage of this position of things, and what was going on that Sunday on the promenade seemed a public manifestation of the intentions of both families. All the town was watching the parties, and Madame Lescalle's attitude amounted to a first publication of bans. There was a sort of official dignity in her way of receiving the indirect congratulations of her friends, and an ironical condescension in her manner of bowing to the ladies whose daughters Artémon had rejected.

Rose, who was that day an object of envy to all the young girls—Rose, the destined bride of one who had been sought after by the most fashionable of the town beauties—Rose, the heroine of the day, did not seem to share Madame Lescalle's triumphant self-complacency. She walked up and down by her mother's side in a listless manner, without answering a word to the high-flown compliments which Artémon Richer was showering upon her.

All at once Madame Lescalle was interrupted in the middle of a sentence. She felt her arm laid hold of, and turning round saw above her daughter's shoulder her husband's red and irate face.

"Good gracious! M. Lescalle," she exclaime "what is the matter? you tumble upon us like waterspout!"

"Madame, you ought to have been at hom long ago," the notary answered, in a gruff voi very unusual to him. "Take my arm, if you pleas and let us be off."

As Madame Lescalle, quite bewildered, wa staring at him without moving, he rather rude separated her from Artémon, took his daughter arm under his own, and was going away, when th young man, recovering from his first surprise, sa to him in a half-jesting, half-sneering tone—

"Upon my word, M. Lescalle, you seem have lost your eyesight at La Pinéde! Did n you see that these ladies were walking with me?"

"I saw it very well, M. Artémon."

"Then why are you carrying them off i this sudden manner? You may esteem yourse fortunate that I have reasons which make m unwilling to quarrel with you."

"Oh, pray do not have any scruples on th subject," M. Lescalle rejoined. "I should like t know what right you have to object to my takin my wife and my daughter home, if I do nc approve of their walking here?"

Artémon bit his lips as if to restrain a torren of angry retort which his rising anger was about t

give vent to. He said tolerably calmly: "Your conduct, sir, is quite inexplicable."

M. Richer de Montlouis came up at that moment, and exclaimed: "Is this the way you take, sir, of breaking off the negotiation you so readily entered into?"

"You may think what you please about it, sir," M. Lescalle answered, and then making a low bow to M. Richer, he hurried away his wife and daughter.

Madame Lescalle was astounded. During eighteen years of married life, she had never seen her husband behave in such a strange and unwarrantable manner. She foresaw a quarrel with the Richer family rendered inevitable, and all her hopes destroyed by this unaccountable burst of temper. M. Lescalle's conduct struck her as so extraordinary, that she felt almost afraid he had gone out of his mind. The more she thought of it, the more her surprise and annoyance increased.

As the notary and his companions walked from the Tasse to the Rue Droite, where they lived, not a word was said. When they arrived at their house, M. Lescalle, red, breathless, and agitated, stood opposite the couch on which his wife and Rose had seated themselves. The mother and daughter were awaiting his first words with equal, though a different kind of anxiety. But he remained

silent for a few instants, as if hardly knowing how to preface what he had to say.

Her husband's evident embarrassment inspired Madame Lescalle with courage, and in her most acrimonious voice she began the attack.

"Sir, are you going at last to explain the reason of your extraordinary behaviour? Will you, if you please, tell us why you have insulted the only family in this place which offered a suitable marriage for Rose?"

"Rose will have a husband," M. Lescalle replied, in a dignified manner, "worth all the Richers in the world. M. le Comte de Védelles has just asked her in marriage for his son."

"For M. Jacques?" the young girl exclaimed, blushing crimson.

"No; for M. George—which is just as good. He is quite as rich as his brother. His father settles upon him twenty-five thousand francs a year."

A dead silence ensued. Then Madame Lescalle, divided between the prospect of so magnificent a connection and a feeling of maternal anxiety, said:

"What? the youngest brother—the *fada?*"

"*Fada* yourself!" exclaimed the exasperated notary. "How can you talk such ridiculous nonsense, Virginie? George de Védelles is a very pleasing young man. Rose will be very happy with him."

When Rose had heard the name of George, she had turned as white as her cambric collar, and leant back unable to utter a word.

The idea of an objection to this marriage had not entered into M. Lescalle's mind. To do him justice, he had always considered the reports as to George de Védelles' incapacity of mind as greatly exaggerated. He believed him to be a young man of no abilities, and somewhat below par in intellect, but by no means half-witted. In spite of all his worldliness, he would not have married his daughter to an idiot. He was not aware of the degree to which the reports of his mental deficiency had been spread in the neighbourhood, and how deeply they had prejudiced Rose against George de Védelles. Seeing his daughter so deeply affected, he went up to her, and patting her cheek, said:

"Well, after all you were quite right, Rosette, to turn up your nose at M. Richer's son. I hope you are satisfied now. Who would ever have expected my little girl to be Madame la Baronne?"

Rose sat cold and motionless as a statue. She felt as if a terrible nightmare was oppressing her. At last, bursting into tears, she threw herself into her father's arms, sobbing violently, and in broken accents said:

"Oh, my dear father, you cannot mean that you have really accepted this horrid proposal. I am

sure you cannot want me to marry that half-witted youth. What a dreadful thing it would be to be the wife of such a man! You would not make me miserable! You did not know that I should hate the thoughts of it. Oh, I am sure that it cannot be, that nothing is settled about it. You will change your mind, and tell them so, for you are a dear good father, and you love your little Rose. O dear, dear papa, for God's sake speak, and tell me that you will withdraw your promise, if you have made one. You won't speak. Oh! I am quite broken-hearted—quite miserable!"

M. Lescalle, very much distressed by his daughter's tears and vehemence, held her in his arms, and instead of speaking, kissed her hair and tried to soothe her by his caresses, as if she had been a baby.

"Come, come, my child," he said at last, "don't cry now; be a sensible girl. Yes, I love my little Rosy, and I want her to be happy. Now, please don't cry so, my darling. You are quite mistaken about M. George. He is not at all the sort of person you think."

Madame Lescalle, affected at the sight of her daughter's grief, pulled her husband by the arm and said, "Would it not be better, Toussaint, to let her marry Artémon Richer, and be happy?"

"Oh, but mamma," cried Rose, lifting up her

face, streaming with tears, "I should not be happy with M. Artémon. I don't want to be married at all. I would rather live always at home with papa and you."

These words gave an immediate advantage to M. Lescalle, who said, "Nonsense, nonsense; that is what romantic girls always say when their parents want them to make a sensible marriage. You see, Virginie, we must insist upon being obeyed. She does not want to marry either of these suitors. Yesterday she came crying to my room, and wanted me to refuse Artémon."

"If I am absolutely obliged to marry one or the other of those gentlemen, I had rather of the two be M. Artémon's wife than marry M. George de Védelles."

"It is too late for that, my dear. If you had not shown so great a dislike to M. Richer, I should have hesitated at the Comte de Védelles' proposal. I would have sacrificed great advantages sooner than thwart your inclinations. But as you have no preference for any one, it is my duty to choose for you a husband. Artémon was a good match, and you would not have him. What I have now arranged for you is still more desirable, and I cannot listen to any more nonsense on the subject."

"But why is it so necessary I should be married?" Rose objected.

"For the matter of that, my dear," Madame Lescalle said, "if you did not marry M. de Védelle nobody would ever propose to you again after what took place on the promenade."

"I should not care."

"Oh, that is all very well; but some years hence you would not be of the same mind."

"Having publicly broken off, as we have done the affair with the Richers, it is absolutely necessary that you should make a brilliant marriage," M. Lescalle said.

"You really behaved very ill to that poor Artémon," Madame Lescalle observed.

"What else could I do? I was seeking some cause to break off with the Richers, and had been turning over in my mind fifty different plans on my way back from the chateau, and when I arrived and saw you walking in that public manner with Artémon, which almost amounted to an announcement of the marriage, I was so taken by surprise and so dreadfully annoyed, that I lost my head. But I am not, on the whole, sorry for it. After such a scene as that, the Richers cannot expect me to support them at the next election."

"What, are you going to fail them about that also. What has made you take such a dislike to them?"

"How stupid you are! Don't you understand why I cannot support them now?"

"No; I don't."

"Why, Jacques de Védelles is going to stand. must, of course, favour the interests of Rose's rother-in-law."

Rose was hiding her face against one of the ushions of the sofa, and weeping bitterly.

M. Lescalle loved his daughter, but yet the ight of her grief did not affect him in the least. t was not a thing that could enter into his head at a woman was to be pitied who married in a ay which secured to her a good fortune and a igher position than she could have had a right to xpect. He had always seen how happy young girls oked when they were engaged to rich husbands, nd so he made up his mind to let the storm of ose's tears blow over, as he would have done a hower of rain.

As he left the drawing-room, he whispered to is wife, "She would have cried just as much if we ad married her to Artémon. Soothe her, and eason with her—I leave that to you."

The mother and daughter, left alone together, emained silent for some time, Rose engrossed by er sorrow, and Madame Lescalle considering what ne she could take. Her maternal and womanly eelings made her understand better than her husand Rose's grief. But there was one idea which owered above all other considerations—now that

Rose could no longer marry Artémon, if she refused George de Védelles, there was danger of her not marrying at all. This result, a most galling one to her pride, was not at all improbable. Some girls of good family, and pretty too, had remained old maids at La Ciotat because no eligible matches could be found for them, and she would have accepted anything rather than such a destiny for Rose. And then M. Lescalle was bent upon this marriage, and his wife was rather afraid of entering upon a course of positive resistance to his will. Like many women of the middling class, Madame Lescalle was in some respects a tyrant, and in others a slave. She governed despotically her household, and did not endure the slightest interference with her authority in domestic affairs; but in important questions, business matters, as M. Lescalle called them, she was very submissive to her husband. She, who would have fought him to the death rather than change, at his bidding, her laundry arrangements, and resisted openly any attempt on his part to interfere with the dismissal or the engagement of a kitchen-maid, trembled at the idea of opposing him with regard to her daughter's marriage. Such being the case, the more she reflected, the more incumbent she felt it to submit.

Rose, who could not divine what was passing in her mother' mind, threw her arms round her neck,

and implored her to prevent this new marriage. She spoke with that vehement emotion which a first grief produces in a young heart. Timid as she was, and unaccustomed to express her feelings, the poor child used strong and eloquent words. She described the irretrievable misery of her future life, the hopeless sadness of her young years. Throwing herself on her mother's breast, she said:

"O mamma, mamma! do take care. Is it not a sin to marry a person for whom one feels a deep aversion? It is so dreadful to think that one will never love one's husband. How can I ever care for this M. George? If I remain unmarried, at any rate I can look forward without dread and sorrow to the future!"

Madame Lescalle felt moved by these words. For a moment the idea crossed her mind that it was wrong to doom her child to a fate she so much dreaded. She thought also of the possible dangers and temptations which might be the result of forcing her into this marriage, and for an instant her heart sank within her. But this was only a transient feeling. The habitual submission of the wife triumphed over the mother's anxiety, and her own worldly nature soon resumed the upper hand.

She kissed her daughter, and, with those fond and caressing endearments with which people are apt to soothe a grief they cannot allay, she tried to

comfort her in her own way, and to set before her what she considered herself the great advantages of the dreaded marriage.

"Come now, my darling child, you must not make the worst of it. This marriage which you dislike so much has, after all, some very good sides. The de Védelles are a noble and highly respectable family. The Countess is very good and kind, and my little girl will enjoy many advantages which are not to be despised, I can tell you. With twenty-five thousand francs a year, you will be able to have four servants at least, and to keep your own carriage. You will be really one of the first ladies in this neighbourhood. Dear me! I should not wonder if you gave a dinner some day to M. le Préfet when he makes his annual visit to La Ciotat. And when you go to Toulon and Marseilles you are sure to be invited to the Préfecture balls. And as to your dresses, why you will be able to get them from Paris. M. George will leave you, I am sure, the management of everything. He is very good and gentle, your father says, and will not thwart or bother you about your expenses. You will be mistress in your own house, and I can assure you, Rosy, that this in itself is worth thinking of. You have no idea what we women have often to go through with a husband."

Madame Lescalle went on in this strain, dwell-

ing at length on that last consideration, which had a somewhat practical reference to her own experience.

All her descriptions of dress, of parties, and of the luxuries of life fell flatly on her daughter's ears. She made no answer, for she felt at that moment that there was nothing in common between her mother's ideas and her own.

Rose was not romantic or sentimental, but she had, like other girls, cherished the hope of a happy marriage, and of being loved by a husband whom she could love in return, and it was with bitter regret that she saw herself doomed to give it up. Artémon Richer's familiar and vulgar manners were disagreeable to her, but not near so much as the prospect of marrying that strange, uncouth being, George de Védelles. It never crossed her mind, however, that she could refuse to obey her parents. She had been brought up in the idea that daughters are bound to submit implicitly to paternal authority in that, as in all other respects.

In some of the old-fashioned provinces of France, this is still the common belief. Is this a good or a bad principle? There is much to be said, perhaps, on both sides of the question. Even the strongest advocates of parental authority will admit that there are cases which warrant a departure from the general rule of duty. It is, again, a question

whether parental authority may be justifiably exercised, in any degree, on this subject. Different nations, different families, different individuals, will pronounce on this point opposite opinions. We shall not attempt to discuss the matter; but in France, forty years ago, and especially in the provinces, there could scarcely have been found an instance of dissent from the axiom, that a well-principled girl was bound to accept the husband chosen by her parents. This Rose had never doubted; and after this short struggle against her fate, she resigned herself to what she felt to be inevitable.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER TRIFLING OBSTACLE.

ILST the scenes described in the last chapter
ing place at the Maison Lescalle, something
r dissimilar was going on in the *salon* of
teau de la Pinéde. After his interview
e notary, M. de Védelles said to his wife:
my dear Claire, you will be glad to hear
ques will, in all probability, be a deputy in
t Chamber."
o, really?—for this department?"
es."
'hat miracle has brought this about?"
very simple miracle; I will explain it in a
. But will it not be delightful to see
at last launched in public life, and taking
the affairs of his country? What an effect
make at the Tribune, with his gift of
g and his good looks! people may say what
e, but a handsome face and figure are no
dvantages for an orator."
'ou think only of Jacques, and we really

ought to take into consideration George's future. It is a strange life he leads here. Your plan of leaving him to himself, the little notice you ever take of him now, will, I am sure, have bad results."

"You do not, I suppose, wish me to make him a deputy," the Count answered in a dry sarcastic tone.

"No, of course, I do not mean that; but he is getting worse again, I am afraid, in health, and I do not know what to do, for it annoys him if I say anything about it."

"Leave him alone, my dear; I have a plan which I will tell you later. It is time now to go to dinner."

They went into the dining-room where their two sons were waiting for them, the Countess whispered to her husband: "How dreadfully pale George looks!"

"Oh, it is nothing to signify, the boy only wants cheering up."

Madame de Védelles looked surprised, but said nothing more. They all sat down to dinner, and the Count seemed in better spirits than he had been for a long time. "What has become of the charming Denise?" he said; "it is a long time since we have seen her."

"Three weeks," Jacques said. George reddened to the roots of his hair, and his father glanced at

Jacques as much as to say, "I see you are right in your suspicions;" and then he said, "It was very pleasant having her here; I was glad to see, George, that you are not quite as unsociable as might be supposed. You seemed to enjoy Mdlle. Denise's society. Well, it is very natural, young people like to meet young people. But I wonder why you run away when visitors call. Each time that Madame Lescalle and her daughter have been here, off you go like a shot. I wonder at it, for Mdlle. Rose is a remarkably pretty girl."

"Yes, I never saw such a lovely complexion," Jacques added. "She is quite a picture of youth, with her fair hair and charming little figure, her soft large blue eyes, her small hands and feet. Amongst all those dark, sallow Provençales, Mdlle. Lescalle really looks like a fresh, blooming rose."

"Well done, Jacques," the Count said, laughing. "You have drawn a very pretty and exact picture of the young lady. And you, George, what do *you* think of Mdlle. Rose?"

George seemed surprised at being asked his opinion, and answered: "I don't know, I have never looked at her."

"Well, the next time she comes, look at her."

George seemed quite astonished. "Yes," the Count added, "I should like to know your opinion of her."

"I have no opinion about girls of that age," George replied in an ungracious manner. "I don't care to make acquaintance with them—they don't care to talk to me, and what does it signify to me whether Rose Lescalle is pretty or not?"

The Count and Jacques again glanced at each other. The Countess was puzzled and did not understand what they were at. She was singularly matter-of-fact and had very little penetration. She did not perceive George's emotion, and only saw that there was something going on which she could not make out, and determined after dinner to ask her husband what it all meant. In the course of the evening, when they were alone, he gave her ample explanations, and informed her of his plans for both their sons.

"Jacques a deputy," he said, "and George married, will be a happy solution of the anxieties we have felt about both our children. One of our sons will plunge into the active and brilliant life that suits his talents, and the other will find a happy destiny in an obscure domestic existence in which his want of capacity will pass unobserved."

Madame de Védelles listened with deep attention to her husband, and seemed struck by his sagacity and the wisdom of his plans. "I entirely approve of your intentions, my dear husband," she said, "only I hope if poor George object to what

you wisely think would be for his happiness, that you will not make use of your authority to constrain his will."

"I have neither the intention, nor the power, of obliging him to follow my wishes, my dear Claire. My authority can only consist in the sort of influence a parent has a right to exercise, and that influence I must use. George cannot judge for himself as to what is best for his happiness. He requires to be directed, and it would be no kindness to leave him to his own foolish devices."

The Countess admitted that this was true, and on the following day George was summoned to his father's study. The Count fixed his clear, sharp eyes upon him, and in an impressive manner said:

"My dear son, your mother and I have come to an important decision, and though I cannot doubt that you would be ready to accede to anything which we thought would be for your happiness, I wish to explain to you the reasons which have led us to this determination."

"What determination, father?" the young man asked in a gentle and indifferent manner.

"We are convinced that it is desirable for you to marry."

"Indeed! and who do you want me to marry?" George asked in a voice trembling with anxiety.

"Sit down there and listen to me, you will answer me afterwards."

George bowed in assent, and leaning against the corner of the bureau where his father was sitting, rested his head on his hand and remained motionless. The Count then began to relate the reasons which had made him form the plan he had in view, his conviction that a quiet and retired life of domestic happiness would suit George far better than any other; the excellent character he had heard of the young girl whom he wished him to marry, and her many attractions, the probability that whereas girls of a rank equal to his own might object to bury themselves in the country, which was evidently what his own inclinations pointed to, Rose Lescalle would be so gratified at an alliance far beyond what she could have hoped for as to rank and fortune, that she would fall in readily with all his wishes. And then he touched on the subject of Jacques' election. A vague, half-unconscious smile hovered on the lips of his son as he did so, and then the Count added—

"These family considerations would not, of course, have influenced me if this project had not helped at once, to promote your brother's important interests, and to secure your happiness."

"Father, my happiness——" George began in an eager tone. M. de Védelles stopped him.

"You had promised not to interrupt me, I ave not finished what I had to say to you. I now what is in your mind, my dear boy, your other, your brother, and myself, have all guessed hat are your feelings."

"Do you mean——" George said and hesitated.

"Yes, I know that you are cherishing a foolish eam, a senseless hope which can never be realized. dlle. de la Pinéde has refused an offer of marriage om your brother, whose position in the world and hose abilities are well known; that you are much o young for her is in itself an obstacle, and even you ceased to be so hopelessly indolent and gave o your strange ways of going on, there would not e the least chance of her accepting you. Jacques' rtune and position did not satisfy Mdlle. Denise's nbition, so you can imagine how utterly impossible is that she should think of you. It would be an osurd folly to persist in such an illusion. You ill find in Rose Lescalle a good wife and charming ompanion, and once married, or even engaged to er, you will see how that other fancy will vanish ke a dream."

There was no danger now of George's interrupt-ig his father. Since the Count had mentioned enise, his agitation had become so great, that he emed unable to utter a word. He grew pale nd red, and then pale again, and when his father

left off speaking, walked silently towards the door.

"Well, George?" M. de Védelles said in his sharp, decisive manner. "Now let me have your answer!"

George stopped, seemed to collect his thoughts, and then murmured something his father could not catch.

"What is it you are saying?" he asked in an impatient tone, "Can't you speak?"

George turned back, and laying a cold and heavy hand on his father's arm, said, "To-morrow, father, I will speak to you."

"And why not at once, my boy?"

"No, to-morrow," George replied again, and left the room.

"Poor fellow," thought the Count, "he actually requires a whole day to find something to say on the subject. Well, I must let him have his way."

No one at the chateau knew how George spent that day. In the evening, as he had not appeared at dinner, old Vincent, uneasy at his absence, went and knocked at his door, but without result. No answer came, and after two or three renewed attempts, he came down, looking very dejected.

"M. George," he said, "is shut up in his room, and I cannot get him to unlock the door."

"Never mind, Vincent," the Count said; "M.

eorge wishes, I know, to spend the day alone: ›u had better not disturb him."

On the following morning very early some ;tle shepherd boys who were carrying cheeses to eausset, suddenly met George near Céreste, at ›out two leagues from La Pinéde. He was ›ming back by the cross-road which led to Toulon. [e looked pale and harassed, and was walking fast, ut like a person dreaming and half unconscious. he children felt as frightened as if they had ›en a ghost. In the *patois* of the country they hispered a few words to each other.

"I say, Jean Baptiste, did you see that man?" ıe youngest asked.

"He is not a man," the other gravely answered.

"I thought it was the young gentleman at La 'inéde."

"Yes; but he is a *fada*, and those sort of eople are bewitched. On Saturday nights they hold heir meetings on the hills, or sometimes on the ea-shore. Folks like that, look you, seem very uiet, and keep out of the way of everybody to hide heir wickedness, which is dreadful."

"Are you sure of it?" the little one said, ;lancing back in affright; "and is the young ;entleman really one of them?"

"Théréson has told me so, and she must know, 'or she says she has very often met him."

"I dare say she is right, for where could he be coming from just now, and he walked as fast as if the devil was after him?"

"Oh, he must have been at the Gorges d'Olliouilles, up there in the caverns where the witches dance at night."

"Don't let us go that way, Jean Baptiste; it is not quite light yet."

"What a goose you are! Of course we are not going that way, it would be out of our road," the other answered in a consequential tone.

George had passed the two children without noticing them. It was about six in the morning when he came home. Everybody was asleep, and he went into his room without any one seeing him. He did not appear at breakfast, and his father, anxious not to hurry him, took no notice of his absence. In the mean time he, his wife, and his eldest son, discussed the subject on which their minds were running. Jacques had set his heart upon the scheme. His vanity had been wounded by Denise's refusal, and he was longing to be a deputy and to exhibit his talents as an orator, to rise in public life, and give the young lady reason to regret that she had declined his offer. Dazzled by this prospect, and biassed by his wishes, he persuaded himself that George's marriage with the

notary's daughter was really the best thing that could happen to his brother.

As to Madame de Védelles, she felt some scruples at the idea of her husband exerting his paternal authority to force this marriage on George, whether he felt inclined to it or not, and the more so that she fancied him too timid and too helpless to fight his own battles. It seemed to her that this would be an abuse of parental power which her conscience could not sanction. The more she thought of it the more nervously anxious she became. Her mother's heart protested against the sort of moral coercion which she foresaw would be used to overcome any attempt at resistance on George's part.

The Count himself was not without some uneasiness. In spite of his strong will, and his conviction that he would be right in insisting on his son's complying with his wishes, he knew that there was a point beyond which he could not go. It was not in his power to oblige him to obey, and George's silence and seclusion made him rather afraid that he was preparing a decided resistance to the proposed marriage.

At one o'clock the door opened, and George came in. His parents and his brother all felt at that moment a secret agitation. Jacques looked

anxious, M. de Védelles troubled, and Madame de Védelles could hardly restrain her tears.

They had on their side age, authority, conscious superiority of mind and experience; and yet, perhaps, because of a slight misgiving that they were not acting in quite a straightforward and disinterested manner, they seemed embarrassed in the presence of one whom they all deemed inferior to themselves in every respect.

George went up to M. de Védelles, and said, "My dear father, I am quite ready to marry the person you wish me to marry."

After he had uttered those few words, it seemed as if he had exhausted his power of self-command, and sitting down on the couch near his mother, he hid his face in his hands.

M. de Védelles breathed freely. To him the relief was great. Without a struggle, without any exercise of authority, or even persuasion, his object was secured.

"That is right, my dear George," he said; "I felt convinced that you would be guided by our wishes."

Jacques was delighted, and going up to his brother warmly shook his hand. Madame de Védelles felt a weight on her heart heavier even than if her son had made some objections, or expressed reluctance to the marriage arranged for

him. She made a sign to her husband to leave her alone with George, and he and Jacques went into the next room. Then, trying to take one of her son's hands in hers, she said:

"Do you really mean what you say, my dear boy? You have no dislike to the idea of marrying Mdlle. Lescalle?"

George did not answer.

"Because," his mother added with a trembling voice—for her fear of her husband's displeasure made her very nervous, though it did not prevent her from doing her duty—"if you hate the thought of this marriage, you must say so, dear child. We cannot wish to forward your brother's interests at the expense of your happiness. Come, tell me the truth, my dear George. Is it fear of your father that makes you agree to marry this young girl?"

"No, mother, it is not fear that influences me. Under other circumstances I should have refused my consent to this arrangement."

"Oh, I am glad to hear that, my dear boy. Then you have not any dislike to Rose Lescalle? You do not know her much, but I am sure you must think her pleasing—don't you?"

"I have never thought whether she is pleasing or not; I marry her because you are all bent upon it. I may as well do that as anything else. You wish me to marry, and I don't care whom I marry."

"Well, I could not have imagined that you could be as indifferent as that, George, on such a subject. Have you ever thought about it? I do not mean to say that in order to be happy together people need to be what is called in love with each other; but marriage is a very serious thing, and we ought not to feel a distaste for the person who is to be our companion for life. I want you to consider the question well, and not to act in this important matter with your usual thoughtlessness. Try to attend to what I say. You look unhappy. Do tell me the truth, George."

"All I can tell you, mother, is, that I have no dislike to that young girl. You have all agreed that I had better marry, so that if I refused to comply with my father's wishes in this case, he would soon be proposing somebody else to me. It is better to agree at once to what he wishes and not vex him and my brother about it. Oh, my head aches dreadfully, and I cannot go on arguing on this subject. I have never gone against my father's will, much as I have often displeased and irritated him. He is determined I shall marry, and as he has chosen a wife for me, so let it be; only, please do not let us talk any more about it."

Madame de Védelles felt sad and anxious, but said nothing more, and George left her.

She then went into the garden, where her

husband and Jacques were strolling. The latter came to meet his mother, and kissing her, said:

"Well, dear mother, how smoothly it is all going on—how obedient the dear fellow is! I suspect that at the bottom of his heart he is very much pleased."

"No, Jacques, I don't think so. He is very unhappy, and, I am afraid, very ill. I cannot get him to speak sensibly on the subject. He says he has no objection to this marriage, and yet he seems wretchedly out of spirits. But I don't think you guessed right about Denise. He never mentioned her name, he did not even allude to her. His apathy is just what it has been all along, only he is much more depressed than he used to be."

"You *will* conjure up fears and miseries," the Count exclaimed. "The companionship of a charming young wife, and the new interests of a home of his own, will rouse him out of this morbid state of mind."

"I have never seen him look so miserable as he does to-day."

"My dear mother," Jacques said, "you will not see things as they are. He has, I have no doubt, some trouble to give up his dream of the last two months, and instead of worshipping the dark goddess at Toulon, to do homage to the fair beauty of La Ciotat. But depend upon it, the struggle

will be short. Little Rose is charming, and I b you anything that in a short time he will l enchanted with his destiny."

"God grant that you may be a true prophet Madame de Védelles said with a sigh.

CHAPTER XI.

DENISE'S LETTER.

"Two days after the eventful decision which l given so much satisfaction to M. de Védelles, l so much anxiety to his wife, the latter received tter dated from the hospital at Marseilles. Seeing ere it came from, she concluded it was a petition, l left it amongst others to be read and answered r in the day. It was not till some hours after-ds that she opened this letter. As soon as she l begun reading it, she glanced at the signature the other side of the page, saw the name "Denise la Pinéde," then turning back to the first page, d as follows:

Hôpital Civil, Marseilles, June 2nd.

My dear friend,—I feel it a duty to tell you what I would inly have mentioned to you some time ago—during some of hours I spent first by your bedside and afterwards by your n-chair, sharing the anxiety, and then the joy of your family, eeling for a while as if I belonged to you all, if it had not that I was bound by a solemn promise, made to my dear on his death-bed, not to give any one an idea of what he was my intention until I had attained the age of twenty-one.

He was well aware that from the time I was twelve, and made my First Communion, I have never had but one thought and one hope with regard to my future life, that of becoming a servant of God and the poor, a Sister of Charity of St. Vincent of Paul.

My dearest father, without absolutely objecting to my following my vocation, had misgivings and anxieties on the subject. I could not obtain his consent to my leaving him. When he felt himself dying, he spoke some beautiful and touching words of assent to God's will in that respect, though it destroyed his favourite dream that I was to marry and live at La Pinéde, the ancestral home of his family. But he exacted from me a promise, as I have already said, that I should not commit myself to the life I had chosen before a year after his death, and until that time keep my resolution a profound secret.

I have told you all this, my dearest friend, to explain a silence which you might otherwise think had been injudicious and unfair. You, with whom I had so often spoken of that love which is above all loves, and in which every earthly love is absorbed and transformed, will not wonder that having heard the voice of my Lord calling me to it from the first dawn of my spiritual life, I should have never hesitated to follow that blessed summons. I often thought that you had guessed my secret. Had I not been under that impression, I should not have stayed as long as I did at La Pinéde. My constant prayer will be in my present dear home—the home of the poor and the suffering—that the days I remained under your roof may not have been spent there entirely in vain, that if unconsciously I have caused pain to one you love, that it may not have been a bitter or a cruel pain, and that blessings, both earthly and heavenly, may soon heal and dissipate it.

I am only a postulant in this house, but my real postulancy began years ago in the Chapel of the Sacred Heart. Even as a child I used to promise our Lord to belong to Him, and to Him alone, and He took me at my word.

I feel bound to pray for both your sons. The honour M. Jacques has done me, and which he will now forgive me, if he

has not yet done so, for refusing, binds me to remember him gratefully before God, and to ask unceasingly for him the priceless gift of faith. As to M. George, his rash vow gives me a sense of duty towards him. Sœur Denise will one day claim something good and great from him in return for her appearance in the little chapel of La Pinéde.

You now understand, dearest friend, my strange request that you will keep all the relics of my dear parents in the home of my childhood. I shall never look upon them again; my home will henceforward be a hospital, or a house of charity, in France, or in China, in Turkey, or in America. Oh, the strange, the intense joy of such a farewell to all but Christ and His poor! Forgive if I cannot restrain this cry of gratitude. It is not selfish, dear friend. I carry you and yours in my heart, a weak and a worthless heart, but so full of ardent desire for the salvation of souls, that perhaps God will let it influence with that holy passion those it cherishes and prays for.

With respectful and kind regards to M. le Comte de Védelles, I remain, dear Countess, your affectionate,

DENISE DE LA PINÉDE.

Strange as it may seem, it had never occurred to Madame de Védelles to suspect what, after all, was natural enough in one so religious and devoted as Mdlle. de la Pinéde. Her vocation took her entirely by surprise; but the surprise was by no means a disagreeable one. A feeling of resentment, which her better feelings had vainly striven entirely to subdue, had been working in her heart at Denise's flat refusal of Jacques' proposal. Since, indeed, she had been led to believe that George had also fallen in love with her, she had rejoiced that the

pain and embarrassment which might have ensued from such a complication had been avoided, but still she could not get over the fact that her handsome, clever, and agreeable son had met with a rebuff.

It was therefore with grateful, soothed feelings that she rejoiced over the vocation of her young friend, and the thought that the beautiful and gifted girl who had made so deep an impression on both her sons would be acting, as it were, the part of a guardian angel, invisibly watching over lives, which, in different ways, were full of subjects of anxiety, was dear to that poor mother's heart. She took Denise's letter into the drawing-room, where her sons had been obliged to attend all the morning to the Count and M. Lescalle's discussions as to the marriage settlements; that is to say, Jacques had listened, and now and then made a suggestion or a remark. As to George, he did not appear more interested in the matter than if there had been question of the letting of a farm, or a sale of timber. At last the notary had gathered up his papers, taken up his portfolio, and departed well satisfied with the result of his morning's work, M. de Védelles and Jacques were talking of the election, and George lying half asleep on the couch.

The Countess came in, and sitting down at the table, said in a low voice to her husband, "Read this letter."

M. de Védelles took it, and as he mastered the contents, his brows were raised in astonishment, and a doubtful smile hovered on his lips. But when he had finished it, he said, "Well, I respect her for it. She is acting up to her convictions. She is a brave and noble soul. I wish——"

He was beginning a sentence which he did not finish, for his eyes met those of his youngest son fixed upon him with a strange and deep expression.

"You must read this, Jacques," he said, handing the letter to the eldest brother.

Jacques had almost got over his attachment, if it could be so called, to Mdlle. de la Pinéde, but his vanity had been cruelly hurt. When it was made clear to him that she had rejected him for no other reason than the strange and, to him, the incomprehensible one that she liked better to be a Sister of Charity than the Countess de Védelles and his wife, he felt considerably mollified and relieved. The untranslatable French ejaculation *à la bonne heure*, escaped his lips, and then he added: "Oh, well, if it is *le bon Dieu* who is preferred to one, it may be a matter of regret, but one cannot be affronted. Don't you think so, George?"

He handed the letter carelessly to his brother, who took it in an absent and apparently listless manner, and slowly getting up from the couch, walked out of the room and across the garden,

straight to the chapel. There he knelt down, and spread Denise's letter before him.

Its contents were no news to him. On that evening when he had disappeared from the family circle, and was supposed to have shut himself up in his room, he had walked all the way to Toulon. Scarcely knowing what he was going to do, he felt he must see Denise, must speak to her. If she gave him the slightest hope—no, not even hope, but if she did not laugh at his love, if she did not scout and scorn him, if she would suffer him to love her in silence, to worship her in secret, if she would take him in hand and raise him by the might of her strong faith and her ardent devotion to those higher regions of the soul to which he had felt his spirit led during her stay at La Pinéde, if she would be really to him a visible guardian angel, he would resist every attempt to chain his life to that of another woman, and brave an angry father, whose will he had never resisted.

His excitement had increased with every step of that toilsome journey, and by the time he had reached the outskirts of Toulon, the transition from light to darkness, so sudden in those regions, was just taking place. He was making his way to Madame de Brissac's house with a wild, impetuous determination that he would see Denise, that he would pour forth at her feet the passionate emotions

of his heart, and hear from her the words which would give him courage to face his own family, and assert his independence. As he hurried along the street, some one tapped him on the shoulder. He turned round, and saw that it was Dr. Dubois.

"You here, M. George?" the physician said. "How are you all at La Pinéde? I hope Madame la Comtesse is well, and feels no pain in her arm now. By the way, I suppose she was satisfied with the *garde malade* I recommended. She is a capital hand at nursing, that fair lady, and will make an excellent Sister of Charity. Not but that I think it rather a pity that such a beautiful face should be hid under a *cornette*, much as I love and revere that strange head-dress."

"What do you mean, Dr. Dubois?" George stammered in a nervous manner, "does Mdlle. de la Pinéde intend——?"

"*Intend*, my good sir! she *went* yesterday to the hospital at Marseilles, and is at this moment, I have no doubt, already at work under the Sisters. I saw her just before her departure. No bride ever looked brighter and happier. Women are wonderful when they get what they call a vocation, and take to be saints. There is a bit of the soldier, too, in these Sisters of Charity. I like them for that. They are afraid of nothing. Good night,

M. George. Give my kind respects to M. le Comte and Madame la Comtesse."

Gone!—gone for ever! Severed from him, not by a grate, or by convent walls, but by a life as hopelessly separated from his own as if an abyss had opened between them. George felt stunned, and mechanically walked on to the ramparts till he came to a bench, and there he sat looking at the sea and the starry sky with a sort of hopeless, dull dejection. None knew what had been the sufferings of his soul during the last three years. He had led a very strange, a very lonely life, with no inward light as to his own state of mind, puzzled about himself as much as others were about him. From the moment he had seen Denise, the apathy which had so long oppressed him disappeared. His admiration—his love at first sight for her—seemed to awaken his dormant faculties. Her faith and her enthusiasm rekindled smouldering sparks which had languished in his soul. George had never lost his belief in religion, or entirely omitted its most essential duties; but since his illness he had not thought much about it. His piety, if he had any, was of the vaguest description—a sort of almost pantheistic worship of the beauties of nature—a poetical and dreamy religious feeling, such as inspired Victor Hugo in his earlier days, and Lamartine when he wrote his Meditations, and had

not yet indulged in wild sophistry and heretical aberrations.

But Denise's faith had struck him as something at once divine and real. During the three weeks she had spent at La Pinéde the life of his soul had revived, but it was only a reflected light as yet. During her absence he had suffered deeply. Her presence had been the delight, and at the same time the strength, as it were, of his existence. It was as if a blind person had for a while, in some strange manner, seen and gazed on a world new to him, and then that the light had gone out and left him in his previous darkness. But still he had lived on the memory of those days. He had looked to their renewal; he had seen bright visions, and dreamed wonderful dreams, till that moment when, sitting in the deepening shades of night, he felt the old, hard, dull feeling in his heart returning, only with a more aching oppression than before.

At last he rose, and with feverish speed retraced his steps. It was then that the little shepherds thought they saw a ghost pass them on the road; it was then that he silently slipped into his room; then that he took out of their box the toys of little Denise de la Pinéde, and wept over them as a child; then that he felt careless of his own destiny, indifferent to his own life—anything then he could endure except a struggle, except another allusion to

his vain love for that angel who had disappeared for ever from his sight; then that he had yielded that calm, supine consent to a marriage which could not make him more miserable than he was, and at any rate would content others.

When Denise's letter was given to him, he carried it, as we have said, into the chapel where he had last seen her. He read it on his knees, and it soothed his anguish. The idea that in prayer, at least, she would sometimes think of him, relieved the sharp pain at his heart. He rejoiced at the vow he had made. It seemed to keep up a sort of link between them. He did not pray, unless there was tacit prayer in the tears he shed in our Lord's presence, and his silent gaze at the tabernacle, which he had seen her gazing at with such ineffable love; but there came to him during those hours thoughts which made him say to his mother, when he gave her back Denise's letter, "She has chosen the better part."

CHAPTER XII.

A MISCONCEPTION.

In the midst of the sort of moral tempest in which Rose Lescalle found herself submerged, she turned towards what seemed to her a beacon light in a dark sea—the wise and tender love of her old Aunt Médé.

In the evening of the day when the scene we have described had taken place in the notary's house, she went out by a back door, walked down an alley which led to the old ramparts of La Ciotat, and then, hiding her face with her veil, and walking as fast as if she was making her escape, took the road to the Capucins.

When she arrived under the dark projection which formed a sort of porch to the old convent, she raised with a trembling hand the heavy iron latch, and crossing a dark passage rushed into the hall, where Misé Médé's old servant was spinning.

"Jesus, Mary! how you frightened me, mademoiselle!" Marion exclaimed, quite startled at the young lady's sudden appearance.

"Marion, where is my aunt?" Rose asked.

"Where she is now, that is difficult to say; but if Blanquette has made good use of her legs (Blanquette was the mare that dragged Misé Médé's tilted cart) she must be a good way off by this time."

"What! is my aunt gone out?"

"Gone out? she is gone away!"

"Good heavens! Gone away! Why? When?" Rose exclaimed in despair at this news.

"What happened was this, mademoiselle. Misé Médé received this morning a letter from her old cousin M. Vincent Lescalle, Curé of St. Blaise. The poor dear man said he was very ill, and wanted to see her before he died. Misé said, 'I must be off,' and no sooner said than done. She stuffed six chemises and half-a-dozen pocket-handkerchiefs into a bag, ordered Blanquette to be harnessed, and off she went full trot to Marseilles, on her way to St. Blaise."

"Without letting us know," Rose sighed.

"Oh, but indeed she did write a note to M. Lescalle—here it is in my pocket. She told me to take it, but I thought there was no hurry. I meant to give it to Casimir the carrier, but as you are here, mademoiselle, perhaps you will take charge of it."

Rose took the letter, and in an absent manner twisted it in her fingers.

"Don't you bother yourself about that letter, mademoiselle, there is nothing in it but what I have told you."

"Oh, dear me!" Rose exclaimed, "what a terrible thing this is!"

"The illness of the good curé? But you see he is past eighty, the poor dear old man. It is a good old age, and we can't live for ever."

"No, thank God!" Rose could not help ejaculating.

Astonished at this exclamation, Marion looked at her mistress' niece, and was struck at seeing her countenance so agitated. Twenty questions were rising to her lips, but unfortunately for her eager and indeed anxious curiosity, the noise of Casimir's conveyance and his own entrance into the room interrupted the conversation. Rose asked if his carriage was empty, and hearing that it was, she asked him to set her down at the corner of the Rue Droite, for she felt afraid of walking home alone along the beach.

"Not at your own door, Misé Rose?" Casimir asked; "I don't mind going out of my way to oblige any of Misé Médé's relations."

"No," Rose quickly replied, "put me down where I told you."

Even the carrier could not help seeing that the young lady looked unhappy, and spoke in a sharp,

nervous voice. He remembered what was alrea the talk of the town, namely, that the notary l publicly broken off his daughter's marriage w the handsome Artémon Richer, and that M Rose had been crying her eyes out in consequen and as the honest fellow handed her out of his c riolet, and watched her until she disappeared ro the corner near her father's house, he gave wa sundry inward expressions of disapprobation of tyranny of parents and pity for Misé Médé's ni Everything that belonged to the old lady sacred in his eyes, and the poor carrier knew Misé Rose was the very apple of her eye.

In the course of that evening Madame calle had made one more effort in behalf of daughter, whose grief sat heavily on her h The Baron de Croixfonds had left his card fo Lescalle, and she jumped at the idea that sinc Comte de Védelles had not disdained to co himself with them, it was not at all improbabl M. Césaire might, after all, propose for Rose.

"He is good-looking—young Croixfonds, said; "Rose would like him much better, sure, than that stupid George de Védelle she did not venture to say *fada*. "You been too much in a hurry about this man Toussaint."

"Nonsense, Virginie! You are so foolish a

this sort of thing. Don't you see that we should have been obliged to give fifty thousand francs with Rose if she had married the Baron's son, whereas the de Védelles make settlements and do not care about her fortune. It is a wonderful piece of luck, I can tell you, and your daughter will think so too when she gets over all these school-girl fancies and becomes a sensible woman."

Rose was indeed so much under the influence of what her father called her school-girl fancies that she still cherished a lingering hope that her marriage would not take place. Misé Médé was the only person capable of influencing M. Lescalle's actions, and she clung to the thought that by writing to her and letting her know what was going on, she might yet escape her dreaded fate. Accordingly she sent a letter to her aunt, in which she implored her to come back as soon as possible and help her out of this hateful predicament. When this had been accomplished she felt quieter, and offered no active opposition to her father's projects.

As to M. Lescalle, he hastened affairs as much as possible, and contrived so effectually to expedite them, that a day or two after the conditions as to settlements had been agreed upon by the two fathers, M. le Curé of La Ciotat published, on Sunday after the Prône, the banns of marriage

between M. le Baron George de Védelles and Mademoiselle Rose Lescalle.

The congregation was taken by surprise, and extreme was the excitement produced by this announcement. The sudden rupture with the Richers and the news of this most unexpected marriage became, of course, a general and incessant subject of conversation in the town and in the neighbourhood. A party was immediately formed on the side of the Richers, which loudly attacked M. Lescalle, who was accused of sacrificing his daughter to his ambition and vanity. It was said that Rose was in love with Artémon Richer, but that her parents compelled her to marry that little idiotic Baron de Védelles. This gave rise to all sorts of exaggerated reports and inventions, which Rose's pale and dejected countenance seemed to confirm. M. Artémon, though inwardly conscious that at any rate the first part of the story had no foundation, found it too soothing to his vanity not to encourage a belief in it. This generally-accepted version of the state of the case enabled him to bear his disappointment with equanimity; and the idea that he might maintain friendly relations with Madame George de Védelles after her marriage with a man she was sure to hate and despise, kept him from openly resenting the way in which her father had behaved to him.

As to the Richer family, who were restrained by no such considerations, they were loud and bitter in their abuse of the notary.

The Croixfonds, who had also been thrown over by M. Lescalle, vented their resentment by taking part with the Richers. It was curious to see how on this occasion the representatives in La Ciotat of a penurious aristocracy and of a wealthy democracy, were for the time being united by a sense of common wrongs. This momentary fusion of the two camps produced a somewhat formidable amount of hosility. M. Lescalle saw this very plainly, and did not like it at all. He hated a struggle. His character was peaceable as well as ambitious, and what he wanted was to carry his point without an open breach with anybody. The sensation produced by this marriage began to disquiet him, and he was particularly afraid of these drawing-room agitations reaching the ears and exciting the feelings of his electoral clients.

He knew very well that the lower classes in town and country do not easily interest themselves in discussions of this sort, but that they are quite capable of being roused to it if they become loud and prolonged. The circumstances were imperative; there seemed but one thing to do, and that was to hurry on the immediate conclusion of the marriage. That once accomplished, discussions would be useless, and the subject soon dropped.

With this view, he expedited all the necessary preliminaries and preparations, alleging as his reason an argument most powerful in the eyes of the Comte de Védelles and his eldest son, viz., the necessity of his going, without loss of time, on a round of visits to the voters in order to secure their support for Jacques de Védelles.

When everything was ready, and then only, he wrote to Aunt Médé to urge her to come back. He had taken care in his letter not to inform her fully of the state of the case. When he announced to her Rose's marriage, he spoke of his future son-in-law as the son of the Comte de Védelles, and poor Misé Médé never had any doubt but that it was Jacques who was going to marry her darling.

The notary's position had become desperate from the moment he had burnt his ships with regard to any other alliance than that with the de Védelles, and he felt it impossible to stop at half measures, so he intercepted Rose's appealing letter to her aunt, and reasoned himself into the belief that he was acting in the best way for his daughter's happiness and peace of mind. That the marriage must take place was a matter of course, and much the best thing that could happen to her. Therefore it would clearly be wrong not to prevent by every means in his power the bad effects which Aunt Médé's unreasoning tenderness and her exaggerated

cruples, founded on idle, groundless reports, might roduce in the girl's mind.

Not hearing from Rose herself, Misé Médé said › herself: "The dear child is too full of her appiness, and too busy, I suppose, about her 'ousseau to write to her old aunt. Never mind, ıe sight of her sweet, bright face when we meet ill tell me more than any letters can do."

It seemed as if fortuitous circumstances ɔnspired to favour M. Lescalle's schemes. One ıorning the Mayor of La Ciotat walked into his ffice.

"My dear Lescalle," he said, "was it not on 'hursday next that we were going to marry your aughter?"

"Yes, my dear sir; at ten o'clock on Thursday ıorning."

"Oh, I thought so; but I have come to ask if ɔu would mind delaying it a little. The Prefect as written and invited me to stay with him for two ays. He wants to speak to me on some important usiness, but I shall be home again on Saturday ɾening."

"Then that would put off the marriage to the ıllowing Monday?"

"Yes."

This did not at all suit M. Lescalle's views. o wait till Monday was to leave Misé Médé, who

was to arrive on Wednesday night, the eve of the day fixed for the civil marriage, for four days longer to cry with and over Rose, and perhaps stir her up to resistance. That would never do.

Suddenly a bright thought struck the notary's mind.

"When do you go?" he asked the Mayor.

"Wednesday evening."

"Then, how would it be if, instead of postponing the marriage, we were to fix on Wednesday, instead of Thursday morning for the ceremony at the Mairie. Would that be inconvenient to you?"

"Not in the least."

"You can arrange for Wednesday?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, then, I think we may settle upon that. I shall go at once and arrange it with M. de Védelles."

"How will it be about Mdlle. Médé's arrival? Can you get her here in time?"

"Oh, I daresay she will be here before Wednesday; we can write to her, you know; but if by any chance she did not come in time for your part of the business, M. le Maire, she would be present at the religious function, which will take place on Thursday. That, you know, is the chief thing in my Aunt Médé's eyes."

This change of days ensured the desired object.

Aunt Médé would not arrive before Rose's fate was fixed, and this was a great relief to M. Lescalle.

Misé Médé had been rather surprised that such short notice had been given her of the day of the marriage. She had only been left just time to arrive in time. Her old relative had been getting better for the last fortnight. She took an affectionate leave of him, and then, with a heart as light as a young girl's, she began her homeward journey, full of joy at the idea of Rose's happiness. As she travelled from Manosque to Marseilles, and then to La Ciotat, the most delightful illusions occupied her mind.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CIVIL MARRIAGE.

"FEW are the words which, once read over, totally change our existence and fix our fate in life for ever." *

This was written by an English authoress fifty years ago, when the Anglican service was the only valid form of marriage for all persons in this country, whatever might be their own religion. But simpler and yet more dry is the purely civil ceremony which in France seals, in the eye of the law, the contract linking together for ever two human destinies. It seems so easy to write one's name on the page of a Register, and then to give a monosyllabic answer to the question put to one by a gentleman in black, after reading aloud a string of official sentences.

The only valid part of the great act called marriage which the law takes cognisance of, is now nothing more than a simple formality. Oh, if young people thought more of what they were doing, if

* *Marriage in High Life.*

they considered the irrevocable nature of those easily uttered words, of that signature so carelessly given, would they not oftener hesitate in following the impulses of their own impetuous self-will, or yielding too easily to the persuasions of others? would they not be more afraid of rushing, without prayer, without reason, without guidance, into an indissoluble union, the holiest of earthly vocations when sanctified by religion, the dreariest of bondages when unblest by human love and unsustained by the grace of the sacrament?

But youth is thoughtless, it attaches little importance to its own acts, it is prone to hope blindly, and hope makes it careless. The only undying recollections connected with the marriage ceremony, our French authoress says, are those of the religious service which consecrates it. "Who," she asks, "remembers the Mairie where they signed their names? Who ever forgets the altar where they received the blessing of the priest?"

Whatever may have been the inward struggles or secret despondency of George de Védelles and Rose Lescalle, they made no remark and offered no opposition when their respective parents informed them of the day fixed upon for their marriage.

During the few and formal interviews which took place between the engaged couple little approach was made even to ordinary acquaintanceship.

George uttered a few commonplace remarks, to which Rose gave monosyllabic answers, and it always seemed a relief to them when the necessity of speaking to each other came to an end.

Rose had been hourly expecting to hear from her Aunt Médé, whose continued and unaccountable silence was a perfect mystery to her. On the eve of the day fixed upon for the marriage, M. Lescalle called his daughter into his study. "Here is a letter for you, Rosette," he said; "a letter from your Aunt Médé." Rose made a joyful exclamation, eagerly took the letter, carried it to her own room, opened it with a beating heart, and read as follows—

Manosque, Sunday.

My beloved Rosette,—I am delighted to hear of your marriage with M. de Védelles. His mother is so good that I am sure her son must be good too, and if he is not yet everything we could wish in one respect, I feel convinced that time and your influence will work a great change in him.

I shall arrive at La Ciotat early on Thursday morning. You can reckon upon me, my darling. Your old aunt will be near you at that happy and important moment, dear Rosette, and join her earnest prayers for your happiness to the blessing of the Church. *A revoir* soon, my dear child.

I remain your affectionate aunt,

MÉDÉ LESCALLE.

This, then, was the final blow to Rose's hopes! This the answer to her impassioned pleadings. Aunt Médé actually rejoiced at her marriage, and satisfied herself with hopes of a change in the one

respect in which it did not seem to her completely satisfactory. "Time and my influence!" Rose ejaculated with bitterness. "Will they change a fool into a sensible man!"

But this last disappointment entirely deprived her of all energy. She saw no option but to submit with a dull, sad resignation.

On Wednesday morning the Comte de Védelles' carriage, driven by a coachman in full livery, passed through the streets of La Ciotat, and attracted to their doors all the inhabitants of the little town. It stopped before the door of the Mairie, and all the family got out, Jacques first, in his best looks, smiling and gracious, and then George, pale and pensive, but without any of that feverish agitation he had shown during the previous weeks. Whether from indifference, or from self-command, nothing could be more simple and dignified than his manner. Every one was surprised. Those who did not know him had expected to see quite a different sort of person, and even his relatives were astonished at his composure.

The Lescalle family arrived shortly afterwards. Madame Lescalle did not attempt to conceal her self-complacent feelings. Her eyes glanced with a triumphant expression round the room. The notary tried to assume a commanding appearance. Rose, though her eyes were red, behaved very well. Her

mother had told her of the report in the town, that she was breaking her heart for Artémon Richer, and this had put her on her mettle. She was resolved that nothing in her looks or manner should countenance this supposition.

Then M. le Maire came in, and stood behind the long table covered with green cloth, which with some wooden benches and two wicker arm-chairs, furnished the room. Wearing his red official scarf round his thin figure, and with the bust of King Louis Philippe, in white plaster, forming a background to his mild and intelligent countenance, he proceeded to perform the ceremony.

All those concerned in it felt at that moment a sort of uneasiness, and a rather troublesome sense of having taken upon themselves a serious responsibility. George and Rose, though the saddest of the party, were probably more peaceful at heart than their relatives. They were acting under obedience, and their consciences did not reproach them.

Madame de Védelles was pale and nervous; it so happened that a minor cause of anxiety, but one which involved considerable embarrassment, was preoccupying her mind, and — such is human nature — somewhat taking off her thoughts from the solemn considerations of the moment.

It had been arranged that the Lescalle family

ould spend the rest of the day at La Pinéde, and at on the morrow, after the religious ceremony, and Madame de Védelles and Jacques, who had siness to do in Paris which had been delayed on ount of the wedding, would take this cpportunity going there, and leave the chateau to the young ple for their honeymoon, returning in time for business of the election.

But that very morning the doctor, who had n sent for to see a housemaid who had been ng for some days, had declared that she had the rlet fever, and gave the startling intelligence t the gardener's children were all laid up with This had occurred just as the Count and untess were dressing and the carriage was at the or. George had had the scarlet fever, so on his ount there was no great fear, though even in that e it would scarcely have been prudent to remain the house, but for Rose to go there was clearly possible.

To put off the marriage at the last moment s, under the circumstances, equally out of the stion, and where to send the young people the t day sadly puzzled Madame de Védelles. She w Madame Lescalle aside as soon as the ceremony s over, and looked so miserable that had it been ore instead of after the irrevocable act had been formed, that lady would have been greatly

alarmed. When the state of the case was made known to her, she of course declared that Rose, not having had the scarlet fever, could not go near La Pinéde, and for a moment she paused and reflected, and looked as distressed as the Countess. But suddenly, to the inexpressible relief of both, she exclaimed—

"We have a little *pavillon* a few miles off in the mountains, called Belbousquet, rather a pretty sort of a villa. Why should not the young couple take up their abode there?"

"By all means," Madame de Védelles replied, brightening up. And after some conversation with the Count and M. Lescalle, and, for form's sake, with George and Rose, the matter was so arranged.

The sick housemaid had been secluded from the rest of the household, and no danger was feared for the de Védelles in returning, for one night, to the chateau. But as Rose was not to go there, it was decided that the afternoon should be spent at the Capucins instead, and provisions for a cold dinner were hastily sent there. This was a very trying arrangement to Rose. The sight of the home of her happy childhood, the rooms and the garden where she had played as a little girl at her old Aunt Médé's feet, seemed to revive all the sharpness of her sorrow, and she had the greatest possible trouble not to break down.

The hours spent there would have been more tedious but for Jacques' unceasing lively talk. It was a relief to every one to smile at his playful sallies. His vanity, which had suffered from Denise's refusal, was soothed, his prospects for the election as good as sure. Madame Lescalle not so bad after all, though she was rather vulgar, and Rose a sister-in-law not to be at all ashamed of. So he was really in very high spirits, and showed off to great advantage.

The de Védelles were in admiration of Misé Médé's house, of her picturesque garden, of the lovely view.

"How I wish my aunt had been here," M. Lescalle said, "to do, herself, the honours of her dear Capucins."

This wish was too much for Rose to hear unmoved. She rushed out of the drawing-room upon the terrace, and burst into tears.

"Why don't you go and talk to your wife a little, M. le Baron," Madame Lescalle said to George, who was turning over Misé Médé's books. "You ought to make yourself agreeable to her, and pay her a few compliments. Young ladies like that sort of thing, you know."

George took no notice of the suggestion, but when Madame Lescalle was called away by her husband to discuss some question relative to the

amount of furniture at Belbousquet, he rose, went out on the terrace, and slowly walked to the place where Rose was sitting. She did not notice his approach till he was close to her. When she looked up and saw him, her countenance changed, she started back with an expression of intense fear and aversion. He perceived it, fixed his eyes on her for a moment, and then turned away in silence. Shortly afterwards the party broke up.

As they were standing at the door Madame Lescalle called her daughter "Madame la Baronne," and made some allusion to her having soon a carriage of her own. George heard her, and again he smiled in the same faint and unconscious manner as he had done when his father had explained the connection between his brother's election and his own marriage. Rose, who had not heard what her mother had said, noticed that strange, and to her, unmeaning smile, and her heart sank within her. As the carriage drove off she murmured to herself, "Married! and to whom?"

CHAPTER XIV.

MISÉ MÉDÉ'S RETURN.

On the following day, at about eight o'clock in .e morning, Misé Médé's little conveyance, drawn / the tired Blanquette stopped at the door of the apucins. The good old lady deposited at home er small amount of luggage, and then with a brisk ep, wonderful in a person of seventy years of age, alked to La Ciotat.

As she crossed the Place de l'Eglise, Misé .édé saw two boys carrying green branches into .e church through the back door, and others ıreading fine sand on the steps of the front ıtrance.

"Is it for the marriage of Misé Rose, my chil-ren, that you are doing that?" she said.

"Yes, Misé Médé."

"This is a happy day for me, my dears. Say a rayer for my darling niece, that she may be always ood and happy."

"Do not be afraid, Misé, we won't forget to

pray at Mass for Misé Rose. She is such a good young lady, almost as good as you, Misé."

Aunt Médé smiled kindly on the boys, and walked fast down the Rue Droite, and in two minutes more reached her nephew's house.

Madame Lescalle's maids were busily engaged in getting the rooms ready for the important occasion. All the doors and windows were open, the covers of the old-fashioned chairs and sofas were taken off for the first time for several years, and exhibited in the rays of the morning sun their faded colours and worn-out magnificence.

"Is my niece upstairs?" Misé Médé asked of the oldest of the servants, who was directing the proceedings of her subordinates.

"Oh dear, no, Misé; she went this morning at break of day to Belbousquet, where Misé Rose is going to stay with her husband. Last night we sent up some furniture, and now she has gone off there with linen and a lot of things."

"Then the young people are not going to La Pinéde?"

"They were going there, but as ill-luck would have it, Babette, the under-housemaid at the chateau, is ill of something catching and everything is in confusion."

"Where is Rose?"

"She has not left her room yet, the poor dear child; I suppose she is still asleep."

"I shall go and see," Misé Médé said, and scrambling over a pile of cushions and a barricade of footstools, the dear old lady rushed up the stairs, delighted at the idea that she would find Rose asleep, and that when her darling opened her eyes she would see her loving aunt watching the moment of her waking, and ready to give her a first kiss.

Rose's room was between her mother's bedroom and a large one in which M. Lescalle kept his papers and Madame Lescalle her pears, her quinces, and her winter grapes. This receptacle of documents and provisions Misé Médé passed through, and opened the door of Rose's room. Struck with painful surprise, she stood on the threshold, dismayed and astonished at the sight which met her eyes; such a different one to what she had expected.

Rose's room, which was wont to be always tidy and nicely arranged, was all in disorder. Portions of a smart trousseau covered the chairs and part of the floor, lace and ribbons and embroidered dresses were lying about in a strange state of confusion.

A large open drawer, where Rose kept her clothes carefully folded up, contained all the modest

little wardrobe of her school-days. By the side of the coarse linen and plain frocks and collars of this scanty trousseau, were lying books with worn-out covers, and soiled pieces of music, also some of those small things lovingly treasured up as souvenirs—a little faded velvet pocket-book made by a favourite companion, the blue ribbons attached to the wreath won at the last distribution of prizes, a little image of the Blessed Virgin inclosed in an ivory case. Two cashmere shawls and several pieces of silk for gowns, covered the bed in the corner of the room. But it was evident that it had not been slept in.

Rose was indeed asleep when Misé Médé opened the door, but not in her bed. She was half kneeling and half sitting on the step of a wooden priedieu, still holding in her hand her little rosary. Her other arm was resting on a chair covered with lace and embroidered pocket-handkerchiefs. Sleep had surprised her in this attitude, her head lying on her arm and her thick and beautiful hair covering a part of her pale face and of her white dressing-gown. She was dozing in that uncomfortable position, like a child fallen asleep in the midst of its tears; sobs now and again heaved her breast. She looked such a picture of loveliness and grief that even a stranger would have been touched at the sight of that fair

oung creature, in the height of her beauty and er youth, thus weighed down by grief. What ıust that sight have been to Aunt Médé!

She went up to the young girl and tried gently ɔ raise her up and lay her on her bed. Rose woke, opened her large blue eyes, swelled with rying, and when she saw her aunt, started up and ırew herself into her arms with a sort of half-ɔving, half-despairing embrace.

"What is the matter, my Rosette?" the good ld lady said. "What makes you weep so, my hild?"

"Oh, Aunt Médé, Aunt Médé!" Rose exclaimed, ;ruggling with her sobs.

"But what has happened, my darling? Is ɔur marriage broken off?"

"Oh, no, no; would to God it was! It took lace yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, yesterday—oh, it is dreadful!"

"But I don't understand what you mean, my arling. I passed before the church just now and ıw the preparations going on."

"Oh, yes, at the church—but I was married ɜsterday at the Mairie. Oh, my dear, dear aunt, hy did you not come back sooner? I had begged ɔu so hard in my letter to come back."

"In your letter? I never had a letter from you, my child. What did you say in it?"

"I said all I could, Aunt Médé. I implored you to come and help me—to save me—now it is too late. Oh dear, oh dear, I am so wretched!" and Rose wept as if her heart would break.

Misé Médé felt more and more perplexed.

"Did you cry like this yesterday, my darling?"

"No, yesterday pride gave me a sort of courage. I would not let people see how unhappy I was. Mamma had told me that they would say I cared for M. Artémon, and I could not bear that any one should think so, for I did not at all wish to marry him. So I made a great effort, and did not show what I felt. It was when I came back here last night that all my grief returned. I spent a part of the night in arranging my things. It seemed like saying good-bye to my life as a girl. This brought to my mind my happy school-days, and all the plans and hopes I had about the future."

"And why does the future appear so sad to you, dear child?"

"Oh, my dear aunt, now you know my fate is fixed, I can never look to being happy any more. This made me cry so much that I thought my eyes would be blinded by so many tears. How odd it is, dear aunt, that one is able to shed so many tears!"

"Poor child!" Misé Médé said. "At your age tears flow easily and plentifully, the fount is not dried up. Later in life we suffer more, but we do not weep so much."

"Then at last I had a good thought—I tried to pray. I prayed very earnestly, and I think God heard me, and had pity upon me, for He made me fall asleep. Just now when I awoke and saw you, I thought for an instant that my marriage was only a bad dream. But now it all comes back upon me, and I know it is irrevocable. I can never, never be happy again."

Misé Médé had not interrupted Rose, in hopes that she would say something that would account for her sorrow and despair. But when her niece left off speaking, she was as puzzled as ever as to the cause of all this misery, and said with a sigh—

"Dear me, my child, what a disappointment this is. I thought you liked M. de Védelles?"

"Oh, Aunt Médé, I hate him!"

"But what has he done, my child, to make you hate him?"

"I feel an aversion to him, and a sort of fear."

"How very strange! You praised him so much that first day when you had seen him at La Pinéde."

"I praise him! No, on the contrary. Whenever

I saw him, I was always struck with his gloomy, unpleasant countenance."

"Indeed! your mother said M. Jacques was so pleasing."

"Good heavens!" Rose exclaimed, "whom are you talking of, Aunt Médé? Don't you know it is M. George I have married—the other one—the *fada?*"

Misé Médé was thunderstruck. M. Lescalle's ingenious contrivances had completely succeeded. The idea that Rose was to be married to George de Védelles, to that strange, helpless, stupid young man, whom she had never heard mentioned but with a smile of pity, had never even entered her head. After the first moment of painful astonishment, this sudden information produced in Mdlle. Lescalle a transport of impetuous indignation and anger. She rose without uttering a word, and walked towards the door. The impulse of her heart was to go and upbraid her nephew, with the full force of her indignant and outraged feelings, for the unjustifiable manner in which he had acted towards his daughter.

But long habits of self-control, the constant sense of God's presence which had become the habit of her soul, the daily practice of submitting her every thought, word, and act to that Divine will which was the rule of her life, enabled her

even amidst the tumultuous impulses of affection, grief, and indignation which, like surging waves, rose in her heart, to pause and ask herself what, in that terrible moment, was her duty to God and to her wronged and beloved child.

Her sound practical sense, sustained by her religious principles, enabled her to see at once, that as what had been done was irrevocable—though it might relieve her bursting heart to charge Rose's parents for what she felt to be a sin, though they did not see it in that light—that it would neither improve the position nor assuage the sorrow of her injured niece. The impulse was conquered. The anger, which like a lightning flash had convulsed her frame and blanched her cheek, was subdued under the eye of Him Whom in that hour she ardently invoked, and then she set herself to the task which she knew He assigned to her—the attempt to soothe, to strengthen, and to elevate that despairing young heart, so rudely dealt with by those who yet loved their child in their own way.

She came back to her niece, took her on her knees as she used to do when she was a little child, and kissing that sweet, pale, and tearful face, she said in the tenderest and most earnest manner—

"My own Rose, I am grieved to the heart now that I know the reason of your sorrow. I suffer

with you, my darling, and I lament what has been done."

"Oh, I knew you would, dear, good aunt that you are. *You*, at least, love me."

"Try not to blame your parents, my child, they fancied they were acting rightly and for your advantage, only they do not understand what you and I mean by happiness. The whole misfortune comes from that. Now the thing is done, and I want you, my darling, to listen to what my earnest affection for my dear child wishes to make her feel.

"You must not give way, my own Rose, to this sort of despair. You must accept your fate with courageous resignation, and see if it is not possible to look on the future in a better light. You have now ceased to be a child. Yesterday's ceremony made you a woman, and you must try to be a good and sensible one. Instead of looking back with regret and despondency, fix your eyes dispassionately on the future. Depend upon it, Rose, no one who has duties to perform, and a loving heart, need be really unhappy. I know that at your age it is difficult to be satisfied with but a tolerable sort of existence. You had fancied that you were to be, one day, intensely happy. You think that this can never now be the case, and your fate seems to you a very hard and extraordinary

one. My dear child, the happiness you had pictured to yourself is of very rare occurrence. Those who have a strong power of loving do not often meet with a return, and it is perhaps still more terrible to lose a blessing once possessed than never to have had it. Many and many women have seen their hopes and their joys vanish before they had scarcely been realized. They have had to say to themselves, 'It is for ever at an end, that romantic bliss I thought I had secured.' They have felt as if it would be impossible to live without it, but they have done without it, and found in life a fair share of happiness. There are in your destiny some compensations."

"You are not going, Aunt Médé, to speak to me—like mamma—of a carriage and smart gowns," Rose bitterly exclaimed, spurning with her little foot the lace trimmings of her wedding-dress.

"No, my child, what I allude to are higher and better consolations than those. I want you to think of the duties which the sacrament of marriage imposes upon Catholic Christians, and the blessings attached to it. I wish you to reflect upon the particular duties you are called upon to perform. From this day forward an important task is assigned to you, young as you are, and a great responsibility. The ordinary course of things is somewhat reversed in your case. Instead of becoming the wife of a

man who could guide and direct you, it is your lot to be married to one whom you will have to watch over, to lead, to take care of. My child, there is something sacred in such a mission. It is a holy duty assigned to a woman to be a kind of guardian angel to one weaker, in every respect, than herself. Yesterday you were a child—a thoughtless girl. To-day you will begin to be your husband's protector, his counsellor, and his friend. You will be to him what his mother has been. You will teach him how sweet it is to be cared for, and to care for others. And who knows, his heart and his mind may expand in the genial atmosphere of domestic happiness, and you may be rewarded by witnessing a great change in his moral and mental state. Love—the love which springs from the highest of principles and the most sacred of duties, is a great worker of miracles, but in any case there is not a higher, or a sweeter mission, than to bind the wounds of the heart. Infinite graces, heavenly blessings without number, descend upon those who devote themselves to this task. Believe me, dearest Rose, those who make sacrifices to duty, who accept the chalice which the will of their Father in heaven holds to their lips, and carry their cross with courage after their suffering Lord, know deeper and truer joys than those of selfish, or worldly souls, who think of nothing but their own enjoyments."

Seeing that Rose was listening to her attentively, Misé Médé's hopes increased, of finding in her niece capabilities for the sort of heroic virtue which alone can stimulate the soul to look upon life and its trials in a supernatural point of view, and lift it up high enough to accept, almost with joy, an exceptional destiny. Encouraged by this hope, she became eloquent, as people always are when intimately persuaded of a truth themselves, and ardently desirous to impart to others a holy enthusiasm in the right direction.

She did not even allude to the sorry advantages of fortune and rank, but continued to touch the chord which had found an echo in the heart of the young bride.

It is wonderful how some natures find relief in the midst of very severe trials by a view placed before them of their own position in a light which had never struck them, and which responds to their intuitive and undeveloped aspirations.

After two hours' conversation with her aunt, Rose was no longer like the same person, and when Madame Lescalle arrived, and came into her room to superintend her daughter's toilette, she was immediately surprised at the change in her countenance. She looked serene and calm, and there were no tears in her eyes.

"Dear me, Rosette," she said, quite pleased,

"how much more cheerful you look. Oh, I have always said that M. le Maire has a gift for changing the mood of romantic young ladies."

"No, dear mamma. It is not M. le Maire who has this gift, but my Aunt Médé possesses it. She has said to me things this morning, which have strengthened and encouraged me."

"Oh, true. There you are, Aunt Médé, arrived just in time. I did not see you at first. You must excuse me. I am so flurried. You see I had to go to Belbousquet early this morning. Everything was to be ready by this afternoon, you know. Oh, dear, and now that I think of it, I forgot the crockery. There is not half enough at the pavilion. What can be done? How will the poor children manage?"

"I can send some," Misé Médé answered, "and everything else that may be wanted."

"That is indeed kind of you, Aunt Médé. I daresay I have forgotten a great many things. On such a day as this one is apt to lose one's head."

"I am afraid, my dear Virginie, that you and your husband have strangely lost your heads since I went away," Misé Médé said in a grave and sorrowful manner; and taking advantage of Rose having been led away by Théréson and seated before the glass in another part of the room, she added, "My advice has not been asked, nor my wishes consulted. What is done is of course irrevocable,

ıd therefore reproaches would be superfluous. ıut," she continued, with two large tears rolling owly down her wrinkled cheeks, "it will be no easy ısk, I can tell you, to reconcile this dear child to her ıt. You have very hastily disposed of the destiny of ıch a charming girl. Rose is affectionate and not ıin. It would have been far better to have given er to a low-born, but honest and loving husband, ıan to your melancholy and morose Baron."

Madame Lescalle listened in silence to Aunt Médé's observations, and not feeling able to reply ı them, she thought the best thing to do was to reak off the conversation. Glancing at the clock, ıe exclaimed with affected surprise—

"Good heavens! how late it is. We have very ttle time left. Ought you not to go home and ress, Aunt Médé?"

"My toilette will not take much time. You eed not be anxious about it, my niece. At what our do we go to church?"

"At eleven."

"I shall be in time," and then Misé Médé issed Rose, and with a look which conveyed all the ıve and all the encouragement which a look can ɔnvey, she departed.

With heavy and lingering steps she walked long the road she had so briskly and rapidly trod ıat very morning. The weight of her age seemed

doubled by a load of grief which put to the severest test her strength of soul and Christian resignation.

At eleven the relatives and friends of the family assembled in the notary's drawing-room, and then proceeded to the church. Everything went off very well. Those who had flocked there in hopes of witnessing something out of the common way were disappointed. George looked, as usual, very pale, but was perfectly calm. Rose was quite composed, and did not at all look like a girl married against her will.

The Richer family who had gone to the church, rather expecting a scene, even perhaps that the bride would faint, could not report any particular appearance of emotion to Artémon. He was rather affronted that what he called "the execution" had passed off so quietly.

"After all," he said, "the girl is only a pretty doll, at this moment under the delightful influence of cashmeres and trinkets. We shall see how long this resignation will last." And then he walked off to the Estaminet de la Marine, and played a pool at billiards.

Three persons had been praying very hard during the ceremony, Misé Médé, who continued to command her feelings till it was over, but who afterwards nearly fainted away in the sacristy, Madame de Védelles, who in spite of the smoothness

with which everything had gone on, felt anxious misgivings as to the future, and poor old Vincent, who had never been able to make up his mind to wish his young master joy of his marriage, partly because he had been looking as sad, if not sadder, than usual since it had been announced, and partly because he disapproved of what he considered a *mésalliance*, and thought it a great shame to have married the Baron George to the daughter of a notary, in a wretched little provincial town.

He had declared that his old legs would not carry him to the church that morning, and declined the offer of a seat in M. de Védelles' second carriage. But still, after all, Vincent was there, his grey head bowed down in prayer during the service, and as he stood at the door whilst the bridal party was coming out he was struck by the innocent, child-like expression of Rose's face. His heart relented towards M. George's young wife, and a sudden impulse made him stoop and whisper, "Madame, I am Vincent, M. le Comte's servant, who has known M. George from a baby. May I say God bless you both?"

Rose turned round, smiled, and thanked the old man.

Later in the day, when the young people drove away after the marriage breakfast, Vincent's eyes followed the *calêche* as it went down the Rue Droite.

With a thoughtful expression, and with his hands behind his back, he walked back to La Pinéde, whence the Count, the Countess, and Jacques departed that evening for Paris.

CHAPTER XV.

BELBOUSQUET.

BELBOUSQUET would have been the beau-ideal of a place for a happy honeymoon. The little villa was situated amidst the hills, in a most beautiful position. In M. Lescalle's bachelor days it had been—during the holidays—a resort for himself and his friends. Many a jovial and rather riotous party had made it a scene of festivity. But when he married, the shooting-lodge was turned into a country house, and he had intended to spend there part of the summers, but Madame Lescalle would not hear of it. She declared that nothing would induce her to inhabit such a desert, and seclude herself from the social resources of La Ciotat. Every year she came there for one week, in order to superintend the vintage and the gathering-in of the olives, and thought those days the most tedious of the whole year.

Like many women accustomed to the narrow atmosphere of a small provincial town, Madame Lescalle hated the country. Nature had no charms

whatever for her. At La Ciotat, her house had a rather large garden, but she never set her foot in it. Two dozen hens, old Théréson's special favourites, took possession of the flower-beds, and the maids, on washing-days, used it as a drying-yard.

Madame Lescalle piqued herself on being an excellent housekeeper, and had no idea of losing her time in taking walks. It was quite exercise enough for her to worry her servants, and ascend and descend thirty times a day the stairs which led from her drawing-room to her kitchen. On Sundays, she almost always walked for half an hour on the Tasse, not indeed to enjoy the magnificent view of the sea, but to meet people, which meant from twenty to thirty persons, whose faces, and, generally speaking, their gowns, were familiar to her. These acquaintances met, bowed, or conversed on the event of the week, whatever it happened to be.

As to the young people who were now going to stay at Belbousquet, neither of them had objected to the proposed arrangement. In George's state of mind, he would have acquiesced in anything which saved him the trouble of a discussion, and Rose rather preferred to be out of the way of her mother's gossiping friends.

Belbousquet owed its name to a grove of ilexes, planes, and beam trees, kept constantly green and cool by a pretty stream of very clear water, which

flowed from a rock at the top of the hill. All sorts of gay plants and flowering shrubs lined its banks instead of the dusty hollies and stunted pines which generally grow on the hills of Provence. The house was small, flat-roofed, and covered with red rounded tiles. The shutterless windows were protected from the sun by white linen awnings. Those of the ground floor opened on a verandah, around the pillars of which a magnificent vine entwined its boughs and rich foliage. That red roof, those white awnings, and that festooning vine gave to this little abode the appearance of a tiny Italian villa.

For many years its only inhabitant had been an old and very intelligent gardener, who had at last arrived at thinking himself sole master of the place. This feeling led him to take more pains in improving the garden than if he had been under the impression that he was working for other people. Thanks to the brook, he had succeeded in surrounding the grounds with those shady covered green walks, which are called *charmilles* in France, *taises* in Provence, pleached bowers in Shakespeare's plays. Charming retreats which attract imprudent birds, and leave them at the mercy of Provençal shooters. But the winged denizens of the Taises of Belbousquet had nothing of the kind to fear, and in the spring their concerts were so sweet and loud, that it was quite a pity that they should have been so

long wasted on the desert air, or the equally insensible ears of old Simon.

One day Madame Lescalle took it into her head that the grass on the hill of Belbousquet could very well feed half a dozen goats, and that their milk and cheese would be profitable to her *ménage*. So she bought the six goats, sent them to her country house, and desired Simon to look after the said animals, and make the most of them. This did not at all suit the old man. He uttered such loud and incessant complaints, that he bored his mistress into allowing him four francs a month to pay a girl to attend to them. Even this was not easily managed, for the wages seemed scanty enough even at La Ciotat. For some weeks Master Simon was obliged to take care of the goats himself, and he so earnestly set about it by kicking and ill-using them, that the poor beasts would soon have given him no further trouble if a woman from Céreste had not brought one day to Belbousquet a candidate for the situation. This individual was a little girl between eleven and twelve, called Benôite, who had never done anything in her life but look after goats. Old Simon engaged her at once.

Little Benôite was as wild, as simple, and as lively as her own goats. From the age of three or four she had lived in solitude in the mountains, and cared only for the sky, for the clouds, for the

brook, and the wild flowers. She loved the birds that she had taught to feed out of her hand, and the insects that buzzed over the wild thyme, and the squirrels that jumped from one branch to another; but as to people, she knew as little of them as possible, and was the most untaught, strangest, and yet cleverest little creature imaginable. As shy as a fawn, afraid of nothing in the mountains, she did not mind sleeping on beds of leaves, and spending the night sometimes in caves on the hill-side quite alone, but not for the world would she have ventured on the high road or into La Ciotat.

The old gardener and the little savage got on well together, but scarcely exchanged ten words in the course of a week. He used to get up at break of day, but even before he appeared in the garden Benôite and her goats were off to the mountains. And at night both were so tired that they hastened to retire, he to his little room, hung round with garlands of onions, and she to her bed of dry leaves in the garret.

To supply for the deficiencies of this very primitive household, the active Théréson had volunteered to accompany the newly-married pair, and bury herself in that solitude. Having been in the house before Rose's birth, she felt herself called upon, she said, to give her this proof of attachment.

Very few words had been spoken by George and Rose as they drove from La Ciotat to Belbousquet. He had asked one or two questions as to the environs of the villa, and remarked on the beauty of the country. She had spoken of the fineness of the day, and mentioned the names of some of the villages they passed through.

When they arrived at Belbousquet, she went into the little drawing-room, and he followed her. She seated herself at the window, and looked at the flower-beds. He stood for a moment before the chimney, filled with evergreens, and then going up to Rose, gave her a letter, addressed to Madame la Baronne George de Védelles, and then went out of the house, and walked up the little path skirting the brook.

Rose felt strangely surprised at his writing her a letter. What could be its contents, its purport? She looked at the handwriting. It was firm and distinct: nothing childish or uncertain about it. She was almost afraid of opening it, though she longed to do so. Perhaps it was a bit of nonsense, a hoax, or perhaps it was not from him. His mother had, may be, written to her some advice or some kind words, and intrusted him with the letter. At last she unsealed the envelope, and read as follows:

We have been united by the will of our parents. It is not our business to question the wisdom of their acts. I fancy that

on both sides the object in view has been attained: my brother will be a deputy, and you are Madame la Baronne de Védelles, with all the advantages, whatever they may be, that this title secures.

Two days ago I expected that our lives would be spent much in the same way that many other people spend theirs whose destiny has not been left to their own choice. I was prepared to find in you all the good and amiable qualities which you are said to possess, and which I am convinced you do possess, and I fully intended to try to make you as happy as under the circumstances it was possible for you to be. My own faults and deficiencies, which I am but too conscious of, I hoped to make up for by kindness and constant attention to your wishes. These were my thoughts and ideas when I left the Mairie, where we had been irrevocably united in the eyes of the law, and such they remained until a moment which you must remember, one which decided our whole future. You had left the drawing-room at Les Capucins in tears, and I saw you sitting alone on the terrace in an attitude of great despondency. After some hesitation I followed you. Your preoccupation was so great that you did not notice my approach till I came near you. You turned round, and then in your young face I perceived such unmistakable tokens of fear, of aversion, and of contempt, that I saw at once that you loathed the very sight of me. I can never forget that look. From that moment my mind was irrevocably made up. As irrevocable as our apparent union, is my determination never to oblige you—nay, never to suffer you to consider me as your husband, save in exterior appearance, and that only for a short time. I own that it was almost a relief to me when your mother more than hinted, at a subsequent period of the day, that my title and my father's liberality compensated for my own demerits. I felt that I could leave you for ever to enjoy those advantages, unburthened with the presence and the society of one whom you hate and despise.

I suppose you will agree with me that in order to spare the feelings of our respective families and save them annoyance, which

I think we should both wish to do, however mistaken has been their line of conduct in our regard, it will be desirable for both of us to inhabit this house for a short time, but I solemnly promise that I shall inflict as little of my society as possible on you, and that very soon I shall take my departure for ever. The blame of the separation will rest with me. Once effected, I shall communicate my decision to my father, and make arrangements to settle on you two-thirds of my income whilst I live; your jointure is secured by our marriage-settlement.

Should you wish me to go away at once I am ready to do so. You have only to write to me a note to that effect. If you do not write I shall conclude that you assent to my remaining here a short time—on as distant a footing as the most perfect stranger. I earnestly wish I could restore to you your liberty, but as that is not in my power, I earnestly hope that you may find happiness in the society of your family and friends and the innocent pleasures of the world, which your position will enable you to enjoy.

GEORGE DE VÉDELLES.

Astonished almost to bewilderment, Rose held this letter in her hand, trying to understand her own feelings, and to define them. Could the person who had written it be the weak-headed young man whom people had described as deficient in ordinary capacity, and unable to take care of himself? What was she to think of his determination? Was it a right or a wrong one? Ought she to feel glad or sorry? Was it a great relief or not? Was it true that she had shown him the aversion she felt for him? She questioned her conscience and her memory, and both reminded her of the inward

feeling which had, it seemed, manifested itself so visibly and so offensively, and, as he said, decided the whole of their future existence.

Had this announcement been made to her the day before, she would have felt indeed startled at the idea of all that was involved in it, but relief would have been her chief sensation. But since her conversation that morning with Aunt Médé, a change had come over her spirit. She had enthusiastically accepted the idea of sacrifice and self-devotion presented to her. She had dwelt on the thought of being a guardian angel, and it was a somewhat abrupt transition to be discarded as a worldly creature, who had married for the sake of position and fortune, to be abandoned by the person to whom she had meant to devote herself. The situation was altogether changed; Aunt Médé's advice and exhortations no longer applied, and Rose sat with her head leaning on her hand, feeling as if she was in a dream, and longing to awaken.

"Of course," she thought, "I cannot write and tell him to go away at once, and have Théréson sending for papa and mamma and throwing every one into an agitation: I never can ask him to change his mind as to this resolution, he speaks so determinately, and after all it is not my fault, and in some ways I shall be much happier if he does go away and leave me, strange, extraordinary being

that he is. I suppose I did look at him in a way that must have made a man very angry; somehow I never thought he would perceive or feel it. And then mamma talking in that way to him! One thing I know, I will not have any of his money, and I wish I could give up being called Madame la Baronne. Perhaps I shall write to-morrow to Aunt Médé, and ask her to advise me, or perhaps I shall put it off for two or three days and see what happens."

Nothing happened. George went out with his gun early in the morning, and followed by his dog Wasp, wandered about the hills and woods as he used to do at La Pinéde. Rose sat in the drawing-room with some work in her hands, or strolled in the garden gathering flowers which she afterwards threw away. They met for meals, and then said a few words to each other in a cold and constrained manner, and Rose wondered how long this sort of life was to last, and whether he would go away without giving her any further notice of his departure. Every morning she took up her pen to write to Aunt Médé, but a strange nervousness made her put it off from day to day.

One evening she met George coming into the hall with his game-bag in his hand, which seemed quite full.

"You have been successful to-day," she said, glancing at his bag.

"No," he answered, "I have not killed anything to-day;" and then went up the stairs.

"Not killed anything," she thought to herself, "and what then, I wonder, does he carry in that bag?" and glancing around her to see that she was alone, she peeped into it, and to her surprise saw that, instead of birds and rabbits, it contained books. Hearing footsteps in the passage, she hastily went into the drawing-room, but not before she had ascertained that one of those books was a volume of Shakespeare's Plays, and another the Life of St. Dominic, by Lacordaire.

"What did it mean?" she asked herself; "does he read during those long hours he spends in the woods? Shall I ask him if he is fond of books? He never seems inclined to talk to me of anything interesting. I feel so like a fool when we are sitting opposite to each other at dinner. If it was only out of curiosity I should like very much to converse a little with him; but I am so afraid of seeming to wish to detain him here after that strange letter and his irrevocable resolution, that I am the first to leave the room when our meals are ended."

Sunday came, and Rose wondered what George

intended to do about going to church. She said to him the evening before:

"Mass is at nine o'clock at the parish church."

"Yes," he answered; "but I mean to hear Mass at Céreste at six o'clock in the morning, and to walk afterwards across the hills to St. Laurent. If you will excuse me, I shall not come home for dinner, Benôite's mother will give me something to eat."

Rose felt sad, and as she walked to the village church, about half a mile from Belbousquet, a strange sort of depression came over her, very different from all she had suffered before.

She was not satisfied with herself, and yet she hardly knew that she had cause for self-reproach. The future seemed so indefinite. It almost appeared as if she ought to be glad of the change in her destiny. Had she not told her parents, and believed it, that her wish was to remain unmarried and live with them? And would not Aunt Médé be glad to get back her child? But the more she put into shape the prospect before her, the more her despondency increased. Prayer did not comfort her, for she did not know what to pray for. She had no wishes, and she did not know how she ought to act. Still she felt an insuperable dislike to the idea of speaking of George's letter, even to Aunt Médé. As to her parents, she never could

tell them of it. If the separation took place, they would hear of it from others, not from her.

She heard Mass, and listened to the curé's *prône*, with a dull heavy weight on her heart. When she returned to the silent house where she was spending so many hours alone, she caught herself throughout the day looking somewhat anxiously down the avenue to watch for George's return—and when she heard his step in the hall, was angry with herself for being pleased he was come back.

He was very tired with his long excursion, said his head ached, ate little at supper, and soon afterwards went to his room. She longed to ask him if she could get him anything for his headache, a cup of strong coffee, or what in Provence they called an infusion of tea, but her shyness with him had become so great that she could not bring herself to say even the commonest things in an ordinary manner, and she lost the opportunity of showing him this trifling attention. She did indeed desire Théréson to go and ask him if he wished for anything. The commission was executed, but in a very ungracious manner. Théréson not unnaturally had taken a great dislike to George. She considered him still in her own mind as a *fada*, and moreover, a very cross and disagreeable one, and when she looked at Misé Rose's sad, pensive

countenance, the diminution of her bloom, and the black hue under her eyes, she often felt a strong rising desire to do some bodily harm to M. le Baron, which word she always pronounced with intense contempt, or at any rate to give him a piece of her mind.

Two or three days later, Rose was sitting at the window of her bed-room, which looked on the road, wondering whether any one would come to see her that day. She expected her mother's visit on the following Thursday, that had been agreed upon when she left home, but Aunt Médé or her father might be coming. She dreaded the thought of it, but still longed for something to break the sort of spell that seemed to hang over her.

These musings were interrupted by the loud barking of George's dog. She raised her head, which had been resting on both her hands, and looked eagerly at the road. Perhaps some one was arriving. No! but there was Benôite standing near the gate with a great load of grass on her head. She was vainly trying to collect together her scattered goats, frightened by Wasp's barking —they were rushing about in every direction. The child laid down her burthen, and running after the terrified animals chased them one after another and drove them into the stable. She then tried to replace the heap of grass on her head, but exhausted

and breathless with the efforts she had made to re-assemble her flock, twice she failed in her attempt to raise it, and down fell the grass at her feet.

George arrived at that moment, and seeing the little girl's distress, he helped her to lift up the load and to balance it on her head, and walking slowly by her side he said a few words to her. Benôite answered and they continued to converse. Rose could not hear what they said, but she watched their countenances and was surprised to see that when they came into the garden they still went on talking.

The child stood leaning against a maple tree, and George, leaning on his gun, stood listening to her chattering with evident interest and pleasure. Once or twice he smiled kindly as he spoke to the child, and that smile on his pale, melancholy face was like a ray of sunshine on a sad landscape. Rose was struck with the expression which that smile gave to his countenance. She had, strange to say, never looked attentively at George till then. Before their wedding-day, aversion, and, since she had received his letter, an unconquerable shyness, had prevented her from fixing her eyes upon him. For the first time she was looking at him without fear of being seen, and as he stood there talking with Benôite she watched him with intense attention.

It struck her that his features were regular and refined, his hands white and well-shaped, and his figure graceful.

"If he was more like other people," she thought, "he would be very handsome." At that moment Théréson came into the room, and observing that her young mistress was noticing the conversation going on in the garden, she said—

"Ah! there is M. le Baron talking again to Benôite."

"Oh, he takes notice of her, does he?" Rose said, trying to look indifferent.

"Oh dear, yes! M. le Baron, who has not a word to throw to a dog in this house, often favours Benôite with his society."

"I wonder what she can be telling him that seems to interest him so much?"

"Oh, for that matter, I suppose like takes to like. She is a queer wild imp whom nobody would care to talk to but a . . . I mean a sort of gentleman like M. le Baron. She is half crazy, is Benôite. You never knew such a head as that child has got. Always full of ideas without head or tail, which she strings together and makes songs of, and then she speaks of flowers as if they were people and of birds as if they were Christians; and she is as obstinate and as perverse as a wild cat. And there was M. le Baron yesterday telling

her a tale about fairies, and showing her some shells. I don't know where he got them from. I declare it can only be the likes of such a little savage as that who could tame her."

Théréson, working herself up to a state of indignation, was on the point of giving vent to all the anger with which she was bursting against George de Védelles, but Rose cut her short, and said in a dry manner—

"That will do. It is not your business to criticize what M. de Védelles does."

"Oh, if Misé is satisfied with the life that she leads here, I have nothing to say against it," and Théréson folded her hands in an attitude of resignation.

Rose, to change the subject, asked: "What is that box I saw Simon and the waggoner carrying upstairs yesterday?"

"Does not Madame know? It comes from Paris and was sent to La Pinéde. M. Vincent sent it on here. M. le Baron had it opened early this morning, and spent some time taking out the books that were in it. The floor of his room is covered with them. Such a mess as it is in! All the straw and brown paper and string thrown about. Did not Misé hear the noise he made stamping up and down whilst he unpacked them"

"No, I slept very late, I had a bad night, and felt tired."

"I am sure I don't wonder at that, or at your looking ill, Misé Rose."

"I am not ill, the air of this place is very healthy."

"The air indeed, oh, I daresay; I am not talking of the air."

"I think you had better go and look after the dinner now, M. de Védelles is coming in."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CRISIS.

Zon understood that this was a hint to hold her tongue and leave the room. She went down to the kitchen, and, once there in her own domain, allowed herself the relief of speaking out her mind to old Simon. She had already told him a great many things during the hour he sat every evening cooking his onion soup and frying the eggs for his supper at the corner of her stove.

The aged gardener proved a very safe confidant. He was as deaf as a post, but knew how to make up for the answers—not generally to the purpose—which he made to the communications addressed to him, by a play of countenance expressing alternately assent and surprise, in a way which generally satisfied his loquacious companion. So she abused George to her heart's content, declared that she was not going to allow Misé Rose to be snubbed by a good-for-nothing, ill brought-up, *fada* of a Baron, who preferred the society of half-witted creatures like Benôite to that of his own wife, the most

charming girl in the whole country. This should not go on. She would tell her parents how ill he behaved to her, and, shaking violently her saucepan, in which she was making a favourite dish of the country, called a *bouille-abaisse*, she, for the first time in her life, spoilt it. This did not improve her temper, and, whilst waiting at dinner, she darted angry glances at the unconscious and silent George.

That day, as she sat opposite to him at the little table where they had their meals, Rose could not help now and then raising her eyes to his face and contrasting its sad and indifferent expression with the animation and the smiles she had noticed when he was talking to Benôite.

After dinner, the post, which only reached Belbousquet three times a week, brought some letters and newspapers to George, and a note from Madame Lescalle to her daughter, in which she said that M. Lescalle had taken the horse and chaise for a two or three days' excursion to see some of his clients and canvass them in favour of Jacques de Védelles, and she should therefore delay a little her visit. Rose had written two days before to her mother a letter, in which, without saying anything untrue, she had managed to make it appear that she was well and happy. She had dwelt on the charms of the villa, and described how much M. de Védelles admired the country. What long walks

ıey took. She did not say that each went out one. And then she praised Théréson and said ›w comfortable she made them.

Madame Lescalle, finding all was going on so noothly, thought it better to leave them, for the :esent, to themselves. Misé Médé, to whom she ıowed the letter, was of the same opinion, and so, Théréson's great disappointment, no visitors ›peared.

Ever since Rose had seen George talking to enôite she had watched for an opportunity of :tting acquainted with the child, and finding out ɔm her what were the things she spoke of to M. Baron. This was no easy matter: the girl was deed, as Théréson had said, a wild little creature, ıry difficult to accost, or to detain. After many ıin attempts, she happened one morning that eorge was gone in another direction to find enôite sitting on the edge of a well, surrounded r her goats, which had been drinking, and were ›w lying at her feet. She started up when she w Misé approaching her, and prepared to run up e steep path that led to the mountains. But hen Rose called out to her in the Provençal alect, and said: "I have got something for you, enôite, something which will make you see onderful things—things you have never yet seen -on the wings of the beetles and in the inside of the

flowers," she stopped and looked at her young mistress with a half-doubtful, half-eager expression. Rose, having heard of the child's passion for insects and flowers, had provided herself with a magnifying-glass, the present of one of her school-fellows, which had been lying unused in her work-bag. She gathered a foxglove and looked attentively through the glass at the inside of the flower, and really astonished at the beauty of what she saw there, exclaimed, "Oh, how lovely!" upon which the little girl slowly approached, like a bird who longs to pick up the crumb you throw to it, but suspicious of your intentions, hardly ventures to come near enough. However, when Rose sat down on the edge of the well, and filled her lap with thyme, heath, and hare-bells, and then peeped into their secret folds, Benôite could no longer resist. When the glass was applied to her eye, and she saw the wonders it revealed, a cry of delight broke from her. Catching a ladybird, she inspected it in the same way and her delight was unbounded.

"Monsieur would like to see with that glass eye," she said. "Will you let him?"

The child's question pained Rose.

"Monsieur often talks to you, I think. Is it always about the flowers and the insects?"

"Oh, about many other things too."

"What sort of things? Birds and shells, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, the shells! I hear the noise of the sea when I hold them to my ear. Have you ever heard it?"

"No."

"Monsieur does though, and he can tell what the wind sings in the branches of the pine trees, and what the swallows say to each other when they meet in the grove before they fly away. But I have told him things he does not know. That is why he likes to talk to me. 'Benôite,' he says, 'why is that cloud sailing so fast across the sky?' and then I answer that it is carrying a message from the islands out in the sea up to the tops of the mountains where the snow always lies, and then he asks me what the sunflowers are thinking of when they turn round to look at the sun as he sinks behind the hill, and I then answer that they are calling out to him, 'Come back again to-morrow before the Angelus rings.' When I sing my songs to myself, mother and old Simon, and that cross Théréson call me a fool, but Monsieur pats me on the head and says I am something else, a word I don't know."

"What does it sound like?" Rose asked.

"Little poet," the child replied.

"And what has Monsieur taught you that you did not know before?"

"Oh, so many things about the good God and the angels."

"But I suppose you had heard of the good God, Benôite, and you knew that there are angels?"

"Yes, Misé, but not that it is the voice of the good God which speaks when it thunders, and that the winds do His bidding. Monsieur says that the mountains, and the sea, and the sun, and the flowers sing together a hymn in His praise, and that I must do the same as I go about in the woods and fields, and then he tells me that when he goes away I must talk to my guardian angel, my own angel, who is always with me though I do not see him, and that as he sees the face of our good God, he will teach me to love and praise my Father in heaven. The one I had on earth went away before I was born, and I am glad that the good God is my Father, and that the Blessed Virgin is my Mother, and the angels my friends. I think Monsieur is himself one of the angels of the good God. When he speaks a song, for he does not sing his songs, he speaks them to me, I find it more beautiful music than the organ in the church."

Rose had listened to the child with a strange emotion, a vague idea was beginning to dawn on her mind that George was not only not a fool—

this his letter, that letter which she was always reading over, had at once showed her—but that he had thoughts and feelings which no one knew of, and which he probably considered her incapable of appreciating or understanding. One thing Benôite had said, struck her as if it had stabbed her to the heart, "When he goes away." When, and how soon, would that be? The words in his letter, which spoke of his irrevocable determination to part with her for ever, were remembered with a pang she could hardly account for. Could a week spent in the way the last week had been spent, one in which he had behaved with cold, distant civility, and not even attempted to become acquainted with her, have wrought such a change in her feelings that she was actually dreading his departure, not merely from a sense that there was something wrong about it, though she could not clearly see who was in fault, but that she had begun to look eagerly for the brief moments, when a few words were exchanged between them, as the interesting periods of the day, and that if she caught sight of his face at times when he was not aware of it, her eyes could not detach themselves from it. She had sunk into a deep reverie from which she was aroused by Benôite saying,

"Now I must take the goats to feed on the moor behind those trees to the left. We always

go there at this hour, and Monsieur generally comes home that way with Wasp, who has now made friends with my goats. He is going to tell me the story of a peasant girl, who was a little shepherdess like me and a great saint. Did you know, Misé, that little girls who take care of sheep and goats could be saints? Will you come and hear the story Monsieur is going to tell me?"

"No, I must hasten home, Benôite; but to-morrow morning where will you be with the goats? I will come to you and you will tell me that story."

"Down by the side of the brook where it runs close to the wood, Misé. Good night," and Benôite walked away, followed by her goats.

Rose went home. "I can never forget that look." Those words in George's letter seemed to haunt her. Had that look, that instant indeed decided their fate, as he had said, beyond change and recall? She had been wrong, she knew it, to show feelings she now regretted had existed, and which had disappeared and given way, if not to opposite, at least to different impressions. It had been indeed an almost involuntary fault as far as that instant was concerned, yet she could not but remember that she had nurtured and encouraged in herself contempt and aversion towards the person she knew she must marry, which had prevented her from even trying to see in him anything better

than what her dislike and ready belief of what others had said about him pictured to her.

Again and again she asked herself what could she do now that the tables seemed turned. George really appeared to have conceived an aversion for her. The feeble efforts she made to converse with him on any but the most trivial subjects were met with a polite indifference, and an utter absence of interest. Then Rose felt her temper rising, and she showed a sort of irritation which she could not conquer at the moment, though conscious that it might confirm him in the belief that it resulted from his presence.

No wonder that a young and timid girl in so difficult a position did not know how to act. It may indeed seem extraordinary that she did not hasten to her Aunt Misé, or write to her for advice, but a vague fear of bringing matters to a crisis, by herself taking any step, or acquainting even Mdlle. Lescalle of the determination George had formed, kept her silent. Misé Médé might think it right to speak to his parents and hers of the intended separation, and she abhorred the idea of their interference, either to make that separation a formal one, or to compel him to alter his intention.

This feeling was so strong that it enabled her to receive her mother on the day after her first interview with Benôite with a smiling countenance,

and to speak in a way which satisfied Madame Lescalle that although, according to certain hints which Théréson had given her during a brief conversation in the kitchen, M. le Baron was a very dull and silent companion, and that Misé Rose would soon be ill if she continued to lead such a stupid life, her daughter was well satisfied with her lot.

"But, Mignonne!" she said, when Rose expressed her wish to remain on at Belbousquet, "we could very well lodge you in town till La Pinéde is purified; and, between you and me, I believe that stupid maid had nothing after all but a common rash. You can stay with us until the Comte and Comtesse return. You must be longing to wear some of your new gowns. I have had them hung up in my large wardrobe. There is nothing so bad for dresses as to remain folded up too long."

"I am sure that George likes better to be here than to go to town, mamma. This place suits him so well. He takes long walks into the mountains. He is gone to-day to the rocks of Etretat. I am sorry he will miss you."

"And does he, then, leave you in this way alone?"

"Oh, he heard you were coming, mamma, and"—— Rose stopped, and then added, feeling

that this sounded rude, "and I suppose he may have thought that we should like to be alone together. George is very shy, you know."

"Well, well, I suppose he will get used to me in time, and the best way will be to bring him to us at once. What day shall it be? Next Saturday? And then, on Sunday, after church, we can take a walk on the Tasse: and you can put on your blue and white moiré gown, and your black lace bonnet with the white rose."

"I will speak to him about it, dear mamma, and write you a note."

"Oh, for that matter, my love, I hope you are not going to place yourself on the footing of asking your husband what he likes to do. At any rate, during the honeymoon it is a matter of course that you do as *you* like, and with such a young, inexperienced man—I mean, the sort of man he is—if you manage well you will always have the upper hand. I am sure this is what the de Védelles wished. And if you find any difficulty about it, I can make him quickly feel that when we agreed to the marriage that was quite understood."

Rose winced at this speech, and felt how dreadful it would be to have her mother interfering in her concerns. So she only answered that as they had hitherto not disagreed about anything, there was no occasion for any assertion of her right

to have her own way. She again expressed her wish to remain in the country, and Madame Lescalle reluctantly waived the point.

A day or two afterwards, as Rose was standing by a window in a back passage which looked on the garden, she saw George sitting on a bench with a bit of paper and a pencil in his hand. His face, as he looked up, was full of expression, his eyes flashing and his lips moving. He was writing; now and then he paused, looked up, and then wrote again. After a while he put the pencil into his pocket, tore the paper, threw the bits on the grass behind the bench, and walked out of the garden.

Rose had been two successive mornings to the spot where, at noon, the little shepherdess rested in the shade with her flock, and, seated by her side on the grass, had made Benôite repeat the stories which George had told her the evening before. First about the holy shepherdess, Germaine Cousin, and then about the dear Saint and sweet Queen, St. Elizabeth of Hungary. The little girl repeated in a touching manner some of the incidents of these wonderful lives. She told how Germaine planted her staff on the hill-side when she went to Mass, and left her sheep under the care of her guardian angel. Never, Benôite said, did they stray from the spot, and then, in her picturesque phraseology

l with expressive gestures, she described the acle of the loaves changed into roses, which has n so often painted and carved and sung in se, in honour of the dear St. Elizabeth.

"Monsieur has made me a song about that," added, as she finished her recital. "He made esterday, and I have been singing it ever since. ll I sing it to you, Misé?"

Rose nodded assent, and then Benôite's childish ce warbled rhymes of which the following verses a feeble translation.

By all the humble grace that marked
  Thy footsteps from thy birth,
By all the miracles that graced
  Thy brief career on earth,

By all the sufferers, young and old,
  That to thy threshold came,
By all the lepers foul and sad
  That blest thy gentle name,

By each fair rose that bloomed within
  The vest where love had sought
With curious eye to scan the dole
  To famished beggars brought,

By all the poet's dreams that still
  Are blended with thy fame,
By all the legends, strangely sweet,
  Which consecrate thy name,

By the fair bird whose dulcet notes
  Rang in thy dying ear,
And by the hymns which angels sang
  Exulting round thy bier,

O loved, O sweet Elizabeth,
  Bless all who swell thy train,
And let thy spirit, dearest Saint,
  Ever with us remain.

Whilst the little girl sang, Rose sat with her face covered with her hands, tears trickling down her cheeks. She made Benôite repeat what she called St. Elizabeth's song till she had committed it herself to memory, and envied the child for whom it had been composed.

When, some hours afterwards, she saw George again writing in the garden, his face lighted up with an expression she had never observed in it before, she guessed what he was doing, and a passionate desire seized her to collect the little bits of paper he had thrown aside, and to decipher what was written on them. She watched him out of the grounds, and then furtively made her way behind the bench, and, on her knees, carefully collected every fragment of the torn-up sheet of paper, and carried them up to her room; then, locking her door, she patiently and carefully reassembled and adjusted the bits of writing, and with flushed cheeks and beating heart made out some lines which had a strange effect upon her. They seemed to her very beautiful poetry, and deficient as she was in literary knowledge, her instinct did not mislead Rose.

The lines were full of melody—of the music of poetry—and they expressed forcibly, strong and vehement feelings. They seemed addressed to some one revered, worshipped, and for ever lost, but not dead, for they called upon this being, as far removed from him who addressed her as if death had separated them, still to be the guiding light of his sad existence. He adjured that absent one not to forget, in her hours of worship before the silent altar, to send her angel with a message of strength and peace to him, who, after years of dull apathy, had been awakened to feel, to think, and after a brief gleam of illusive hope, to suffer, with an intensity which had roused latent powers, once possessed, long lost, and now regained. "In the homes of the poor," these lines went on to say, "pray for the soul thou hast taught to love the poor; by the bed-side of the dying, pray for him who often longs to lay down the burthen of life, and rest in a quiet grave. God speaks to thee in the silence of His Sacramental Presence, He speaks to thee through the eyes and through the lips which follow and bless thee in the sick ward or the house of poverty, and He will permit thy words to win for me strength to bear my fate, courage to go through life unloved and uncared for; they will reach my soul in hours of solitude, spent in converse with nature and with that God Who, when He sent

thee to my help, saved me from despair. Faith had waned, hope had died, love had vanished from my soul: even though stamped with acute anguish, I welcome them again."

A strange number of confused, agitating, startling thoughts rushed on poor little Rose's mind as she made out these lines, and pondered over them. Their meaning could not be mistaken. He had cared for some one else—he had loved some one else. He still worshipped in some strange manner that one—whoever she was—whom he looked upon as a saint or an angel. "Then what business had he to marry poor little me?" she exclaimed to herself, with a sudden feeling of indignation, and perhaps of jealousy; but conscience—and Rose's conscience was one of those clear and upright guides which did not lend itself to self-deceit—answered, "The same business you had to marry him when you felt you hated him." "But a man should have more courage than a woman," the inward voice pleaded with some truth. But conscience again replied, "He meant to try and make you happy: his letter said so. And then you spurned him. You showed him you loathed his very sight. Oh, my God! my God! what a mistake I made. Are we both to pass through life, as he says, unloved and uncared for—bearing the same name, but strangers to each other, strangers as we now are,

and soon to part for ever? But who is this woman who he thinks has been a blessing to him, and yet made him suffer so terribly?. Who can she be? Will they meet again? By what the verses say, she must be very good, a great deal at church, and taking care of poor people. I wonder where she lives? I suppose I shall never know. I was thinking yesterday of trying to show him that I do not dislike him, that I could like him very much; but now that I find he cares about somebody else, perhaps that would only make him hate me."

For two long hours Rose mused in this way, and was only disturbed from these absorbing thoughts by Théréson's knock at the door and somewhat impatient announcement that dinner was on the table, and M. le Baron in the dining-room. She hastily came downstairs, and was so preoccupied, that if George had paid the least attention to her looks, he must have been struck with it; but he was, if possible, more silent and abstracted than ever. Rose, remembering the expression of his face whilst he had been writing the verses which had thrown her into so great an agitation, could hardly believe he was the same person now sitting opposite to her, and only uttering, at long intervals, some common-place observation.

She became painfully nervous, answered in an impatient manner, and spoke crossly to Zon because,

in clearing away the things, she had knocked two glasses against each other. He seemed surprised.

At last, when the servant had left the room, she got up suddenly, and said, "I must ask you to excuse me. I have a bad headache, and must go and rest."

"Are you ill, Rose?" George said, more graciously than usual.

"Oh, no; it is nothing. I feel only a little stupid—a little dull. I think I shall go and see my Aunt Médé to-morrow."

"By all means. I think it will do you a great deal of good. Perhaps you do not take enough exercise."

Rose stood with the handle of the door in her hand. She tried to steady her voice. She wanted to say some insignificant thing about sending for the carpenter's donkey to take her to town, but the effort to control her emotion failed, and she burst into tears. He started up, and losing all self-command, she exclaimed, "I can no longer endure this—my life is unbearable."

He seemed pained, and said in a grave and earnest manner, "I can indeed well understand it. I feel it has lasted too long. I have been considering that it is high time that you should be left to enjoy the society of those you love, and be delivered from my presence. You will do me the justice to say

that I have fulfilled my pledge and kept my word. I need not repeat the assurances I have already given you. May God help us both to endure the trials of life. Our paths lie in different directions. May yours be as happy and as peaceful as is possible under the circumstances. Perhaps you will remain a few days at Les Capucins? or else bring back your aunt with you here. To-morrow I shall go to Marseilles."

Rose made no reply. She could not think of anything she could, or would, say, and hurried up to her room, where she remained for some hours absorbed in painful reflections, made up of bitter regrets and self-reproach. It was late in the night before she fell asleep, and when she awoke in the morning it was past nine o'clock. She dressed hastily, and went downstairs. Breakfast was laid only for one on the dining-room table. Théréson's voice was audible in the kitchen, disputing with old Simon. Rose called her, and asked, "Where is M. de Védelles?"

"Simon says that M. le Baron went to Marseilles by the first diligence, at five o'clock this morning. He carried his portmanteau for him to the highroad. So that was why I took away the second cup and plate. Monsieur said that Misé was going to-day to the Capucins. Will Misé want Casimir's donkey? and am I to go with her?"

"No; I have changed my mind. I shall stay here, at any rate, to-day," Rose said, and after swallowing with some effort a few mouthfuls of food, she put on her hat and went to try and find Benôite. She was ashamed at feeling as wretched as she did. She could not bear to remain alone, nor to go to La Ciotat. She wanted to speak of George, and yet the only human being to whom, at that moment, she felt that she could do so, was the little wild girl of the woods—the child he had been kind to.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISCOVERY.

Rose walked with a rapid step to the well, where she expected to find Benôite, and sure enough she was there as usual, but instead of waiting to be accosted and spoken to, as soon as the child saw her young mistress she sprung up and ran to meet her.

"Oh, Misé," she exclaimed, "is Monsieur gone away?"

"He went to Marseilles this morning. Did he tell you yesterday that he meant to do so?"

"Yes, in the evening, when I was taking the goats into the stable, he came to wish me good-bye. He had not said anything about going away when I had met him in the afternoon. Oh, Misé, I am so sorry he is gone;" and Benôite began to cry.

Rose sat down by the child and held her hand in hers. The little girl looked up into her face and said—

"Will he come back again soon? I asked him, but he would not tell me. He only patted me on

the shoulder, and said we should meet again some day. Are you, too, going away, Misé Rose? I do not love you as much as I love Monsieur, but I am beginning to like you, and if you will tell Théréson not to call me an idiot, I shall soon love you."

"Oh, she must not do that," Rose said, her cheek flushing. "People don't know the harm they do when they dare to say such things. I don't wonder, Benôite, that you should like Monsieur better than me. I cannot tell you nice stories, or make songs for you as he did."

"But can't you find stories in a book, Misé?"

"Do you mean if I can read them?"

"Well, I suppose so. What I know is, that Monsieur, when he began telling me about the dear St. Elizabeth, was carrying a book under his arm; and in the beginning of it was a picture of her with her lap full of roses, and a gentleman with a face something like Monsieur's peeping at them. Once he said he was going to tell me another story, about a sick man she put in a bed, and then when people came to look at him, there was Jesus, on His Cross, lying in it instead. He found that in the book. Perhaps, if you had it, you could find some stories in it."

The child's suggestion was not lost on Rose. She made up her mind to venture into the room where George's books were lying about, and to try

and discover this one. Whilst she was thinking of this, Benôite was looking at her wistfully. At last she said—

"Misé, could you take care of the goats for an hour or two?"

"Perhaps I could. But why should I?"

"Because then I could do Monsieur's commission this morning instead of late this evening, and not have to keep Toinette waiting so long for her money."

"Who is Toinette?"

"She is a very old paralyzed woman, who lives in a hut half way between this place and Céreste, at the rocks of Etretat. Monsieur found her out one day by chance—the first day he was here, I think—she was very ill, and afraid she was going to die. Monsieur walked to Céreste and told M. le Curé how bad she was, and M. le Curé came, and he got a woman to take care of her. After that Monsieur went himself every day to see her, and yesterday, 'Benôite,' he said, 'I want to send some money to poor old Toinette, as now I shall not be here to take food to her. I don't know who to send with it; Théréson and Simon would not care to walk so far.' 'Send your guardian angel,' I said. He laughed, and answered that I was for once to be his guardian angel, and when I have taken the goats home I must carry to her this fine

gold thing. It is the finest thing you ever saw, Misé." And Benôite produced a twenty-franc piece in gold, which she held up before Rose's eyes with exulting admiration.

"Now, I shall be tired to-night, and if you would mind the goats, Misé, I could go now to Toinette. She will be so sorry at the usual time when Monsieur took her some dinner, and no Monsieur and no dinner comes. If she has this to look at, maybe it will comfort her, though she can't eat it. But Monsieur says it will turn into a bagful of pennies when she likes, and then she can buy bread."

Rose was hesitating as to what she would answer, and Benôite went on: "You see, Misé, I thought of planting my staff here, just as Germaine Cousin did, and leaving it to take care of the goats, but I am afraid they would not mind it."

"No, because you are not a saint, little Benôite. Théréson says you are very naughty sometimes, and will not do as you are told."

"Then I'll be a saint to spite her," Benôite exclaimed, shaking her fist and stamping in a very unsaintlike manner. "I'll be a saint, and then the birds and the beasts will do what I tell them, as the wolf did when St. Francis bade him keep the peace with the people of Gubbio. That was another of Monsieur's tales. But I shall not tell

the wolves to keep the peace with Théréson. I will order that great eagle that flew across the sky and perched on the high rock above Etretat last night, to pick out her eyes."

"Oh, Benôite, you would not, if you could, do such a dreadful thing. You would be like a devil, not a saint."

"Well, if not her eyes, her cap. I would bid him carry her cap off her head, away to his nest. Should not I like to hear her scream after it! But what shall I do about Toinette?"

"Tell me where she lives, and I will go to her myself."

"Well, Misé, you must follow that path that leads through the wood, and then enter the olive groves and go up the hill. You will pass by a little shrine where there is a Madonna, and then turn to the left. In a little while you will come to some lemon and orange trees, and there under the rocks is Toinette's hut."

Rose went back to the house to fill a basket, and then, laden with provisions, and intrusted with the gold piece, which Benôite gave into her hands with rather a wistful look of regret, she started on her errand.

It was one of the most beautiful of the long days of June. The air was balmy, and though the heat was great, it was not oppressive. There was

shade almost everywhere on her road. Rose thought how strangely different things had turned out from what she had expected. She could form no idea as to her future, and felt as if in a dream. It was a relief to walk, to have something to do, and the fact that she was executing the commission George had intrusted to the little peasant, gave her a sort of satisfaction.

The hut Benôite had described was in a lonely situation at the foot of some rocks; the nearest place to it was Céreste. She easily found it, and explained to the paralytic and solitary old woman that M. de Védelles was absent, that he sent her twenty francs to provide for her immediate necessities, and that she had herself brought her some dinner.

"And who are you, kind Misé?" the old creature asked, looking with admiration at Rose's lovely face.

"I am the wife of the gentleman who has visited you lately," she answered, and for the first time she said that word *wife* with a sort of emphasis, that seemed like laying claim to a name she would not have willingly given up.

"Then the good God has rewarded him for all his charity by giving him an angel for a wife," Toinette rejoined, clasping her thin hands together, and speaking in that poetical manner, which in

Provence, as in Ireland, is so often met with amongst the poor and the ignorant.

Rose sat down by the bedside, and said, "He has, then, been very kind to you?"

"Good as the good God, Misé. He has saved my life—but done yet more for my soul. Oh, if you knew the peace and the consolation he has given to this poor heart of mine!"

"How so?" said Rose earnestly, drinking in each of the sick woman's words, who told her sad and simple story with the impassioned feeling and natural eloquence of a southern nature. It was an often-told tale, that of a mother whose only son had gone on wildly from his boyish days, and had at last been led into crime, more from weakness—so she thought—than from perversity. Bad associates had got hold of him. Two years ago he had been concerned in the robbery of a diligence, tried, and condemned for five years to the galleys.

From the day the dreadful news had reached her, the convict's mother had not heard one word from or about her son. Her soul, as she expressed it, had thirsted for news of him, but none ever came, and hope had died away in her heart till the day that George de Védelles, in his wanderings in the hills, had accidentally entered her hut. To him she told her grief, and, as she saw pity in his face, she poured forth the long pent-up anguish of her

soul, and described the rebellious anger she felt against God and man. He had soothed and consoled her.

"Oh, Misé," she exclaimed, "he told me he knew what it is to suffer; that young as he is he had borne a heavy cross, and that he would try to lighten mine."

"Did he tell you what has been his cross?" Rose asked, with her face turned away, dreading to hear the answer.

"Not exactly, Misé. He told me he had been ill, and lost for years the strength to work, or even to think. He said this when I complained that in the long sleepless nights in winter, when I lie here alone, I almost go out of my mind. He smiled kindly, and then just said those few words, and he promised to get me news of my son."

"Did he succeed?"

"Oh, yes; thanks be to the good God, Who hears our prayers. Ah, that reminds me of what he told me when I was crying so bitterly, something a great saint had said about sons being saved by their mother's tears. Yes, Misé, he wrote to a friend of his at Toulon, some one as good as himself, and he brought me, three days ago, this letter. When he had read it to me he laid it on the bed, and forgot to take it away with him. And oh, I think this was a mercy of the good God, for I have found in it the

words about my Antoine. It lies on my heart all the day, and at night under my pillow, such as it is. You may see it if you like, my beautiful Misé. Oh, you are happy to have M. George for your husband. I am so glad God has given him a wife as good as himself. I shall always pray for you both."

"Yes, pray for us both," Rose repeated softly, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. The letter which Toinette put into her hands was as follows:—

My dear friend,—As soon as I got your orders, off I went to M. l'Aumonier du Bagne, and made inquiries with regard to the convict in whom you take an interest.

It is very like you, George, to write about this during the first days of your honeymoon, for I duly received the *lettre de faire part*, announcing your marriage with Mdlle. Rose Lescalle, and saw in the papers that it had taken place. I must say I think you ought to have written to me yourself on such an occasion; but to return to the point, I say it was like you to ferret out in the mountains, to which you have apparently retired, a sick old woman to visit and a work of charity to be done.

When we were at College, and you were carrying off all the prizes, what made me love you, old fellow, was not that you were clever and bright and at the head of our class, but that if there was a kind thing to be done you were always the one to do it, and you seem not to have lost that good habit.

Well, I have good news to give you of your young man, wherewith to cheer his mother's heart. He is alive—M. Antoine Lemaire—he is well, and what is better still, he has behaved so irreproachably since he has been at the Bagne, that a few weeks

ago he was made one of the infirmarians of the convict hospital, and is becoming quite a favourite with the physicians. He goes to his duties, and M. l'Aumonier has promised me that the next time he sees him he will tell him that his mother sends him her blessing, and advise him to write to her if he knows how, which seems doubtful. Should he be able to do so, I will inclose to you the letter—as the good old lady's hut which you describe is not, I should imagine, familiar to the postman.

If you can tear yourself away from Belbousquet—what a charming name, and how well-suited the place must be for a honeymoon!—perhaps you could pay me a visit next week. I should like to show you the man-of-war which my uncle commands, and which is shortly to carry me off, in company with that uncle, to the shores of the New World. I have heard from the Paris publisher. His reader is delighted with your poems. I could not help laughing, the other day, when Césaire de Croixfonds spoke of you, and asked me if it was true that, since the illness you nearly died of, you had lost all that intelligence you were so noted for at College. I suspect, old fellow, that in that utter inability to occupy yourself with anything but poetry, there has been a tiny bit of *mauvaise volonté.* Am I unjust, M. George? Perhaps so, for a clever physician assured me, the other day, that after such a shock as your brain experienced in that fever, it was sometimes years before a person recovered the power of application, even though the mind was not affected. But God has given you genius, and you will take the world by surprise, especially the little world of your own family, who have, none of them, I fancy, the remotest idea of what lies under that silent, absent, languid, provoking manner of yours.

Write and tell me if you can come here next week, and believe me your affectionate and devoted friend,

ALOYS DE BELMONT,
Naval Lieutenant.

May I venture to beg you to present my respects to Madame George de Védelles?

Light had been gradually dawning on Rose's mind, and this letter, so singularly thrown in her way, revealed to her the truth which she was beginning to realize. George de Védelles was a totally different being from the one the reports of others and her own imagination had drawn. He had been misunderstood and under-rated by his relatives, despised by his father, compassionated by his mother, held cheap by his brother, and hated by herself! No wonder he had told the poor paralytic woman before her that heavy had been the cross he had had to bear. No wonder that when he had seen her on the day she had been made his wife look at him with contempt and aversion—she the ignorant, foolish little girl, who had not thought it worth her while to judge for herself of the man to whom she had been married—that he turned from her with disgust, and left her to her fate. And he had known and cared for one who must have been so different from herself, his very ideal of a perfect woman, whereas she must be, in his eyes, one of those creatures who think trinkets and smart dresses and a carriage and servants the only elements of happiness. She kept the letter from George's friend a long time in her hand, and almost learnt by heart its contents. When at last she laid it down, and Toinette said, "Is it not a beautiful letter?" Rose started, and then answered—

"Indeed I am very glad you showed it to me. I shall come and see you again in a day or two."

"With M. George?" Toinette asked.

"Yes, if he is returned," poor Rose replied, with a pang, for she felt how unlikely it was that he would come back, though if he did, she thought things would be different to what they had been; and perhaps—who knows?—they might be walking through those groves and across those hills one day together, on just such a lovely evening as this one, and visions of domestic happiness, that seemed to have vanished for ever, would rise again before the wedded girl who had, as she mournfully said to herself, turned her back on her own happiness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CLUE LAID HOLD OF.

Rose came home, and after eating her solitary meal she thought of Benôite's suggestion about the large book where Monsieur found the stories about St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and after some hesitation ventured into the room, which was called M. Lescalle's study, and which George had used as a sitting-room.

Next to seeing persons, the thought of whom occupies us, the most interesting thing we can do is to examine a room which they have inhabited. There are so many small but significant traces of their presence. The prominent feature in this one was the books—some of them lying on the floor open and on their faces, others still in the case; some on the table, some on the chimney. A great many sheets of paper, scribbled upon, were thrust into a waste-paper basket. The disorder in which everything was left, gave Rose some satisfaction. If George had really gone away for good, would not he have packed up his books? but perhaps

he had given directions to that effect. She had not the courage to ask Simon or Théréson if he had done so.

Besides the books, there were some materials for drawing and painting in the open case, and in the corner an unframed drawing loosely wrapped in brown paper. She took it up and found it was a landscape representing the Chateau de Valsec, the hereditary manor of the de Védelles which the Count had sold in order to purchase La Pinéde. She took the drawing to the window, and looked with interest at the view of a place where George had spent his childhood. It was a venerable pile of building—very imposing in its old-fashioned style, and surrounded by tall, stately larches which added to its rather gloomy and aristocratic grandeur. In the corner of this sketch, Jacques de Védelles' name was written. He had told her, the first day she had seen him, that he drew landscape, but had never succeeded in drawing figures.

As she was carrying back to the case the view of Valsec, she happened to turn it round, and found that on the other side of the card-board there was the portrait of a woman, a most beautiful face, with a fine, dignified, and sweet expression, which it was impossible not to be struck with.

"Oh, what a lovely countenance!" Rose inwardly exclaimed; and then she saw, at the

corner of this drawing, not Jacques' name, but the letters G. de V., and the date, April 7th, 1835.

That was the day she had been at La Pinéde for the first time. Suddenly it flashed upon her that as she was going away and the carriage in which she was with her parents was driving through the avenue gate, she had caught sight of a calêche going up to the chateau, in which a beautiful young girl was sitting by the side of an old man. She must be the person whose portrait he had drawn on the back of his brother's sketch of Valsec; she must be the person he had cared for and regretted so intensely. Who was she? Then the idea of Mdlle. de la Pinéde suddenly struck her; she had heard of her beauty, and what the ladies of La Ciotat called her *exaltation.*

On the day that she was walking listlessly by her mother's side on the Tasse, whilst Artémon Richer was paying her compliments, she had heard some one telling her mother that the beautiful heiress at Toulon, Mdlle. de la Pinéde, was going to be a Sister of Charity.

How often it happens in life that we hear at one time things said with an utter indifference, which perhaps at some other period would have stirred the depths of our hearts with indescribable emotions. She guessed now, she felt certain, that it

was Mdlle. de la Pinéde George had so intensely admired, so passionately loved.

It must be so. She held, for a long time, the portrait in her hand, and gazed at it with deep emotion. She thought that the heavenly expression of that beautiful face told the story of the high vocation of the unearthly love which God had given to this favoured child of His Heart. She felt no jealousy, scarcely a regret, that George should have known, and loved, and been influenced by one whom he must now look upon as a superior being, a sort of angel or saint. She compared the lines he had written, and which she had preserved, with the picture before her eyes, and not a doubt could exist in her mind, that the object of his love and his reverence was Denise de la Pinéde.

So engrossed was she with this discovery, and the contemplation of the face he had drawn with rare talent and exact fidelity, that it was long before she remembered the purpose with which she had entered that room. Rousing herself, at last, from this absorbing preoccupation, she began to search for the volume Benôite had described, and soon found it. That volume was the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, by the Comte de Montalembert.

Are there not many who at some turning-point of their existence have met with a book

which has been to them like a revelation, and from the reading of which they can date an initiation into the secrets of a higher life, which, when it seemed hard to discern light in the future of their own destiny, opened before them aims and hopes and possibilities never yet dreamed of, heights they had never even in thought approached?

This was the effect produced on Rose by that beautiful history of the most loveable of saints, written with all the magic charm of brilliant genius, united with ardent faith. It was not so much the magnificent language, the matchless eloquence of the great champion of the Church in France, which riveted and entranced her, as hour after hour she sat reading this new-found treasure, as the emotions, the ideas as to this world and the next, which it awoke in her mind. For the first time she conceived what a glorious and blessed thing life can be, even in the midst of the deepest sorrows, when once the relations of the soul with its Creator and its Redeemer have become practical and absorbing. For the first time she understood to what a degree human love can be purified and exalted in two souls united together in the same supreme love. Never has the imagination of man portrayed a more touching ideal of Christian marriage than the quaint old biographers of the dear St. Elizabeth—as she was always called in

the land of her birth—have drawn of her union with that model of Christian princes, the good Duke Louis of Thuringia. The minute details of their domestic life and of the tender attachment and sweet piety of these wedded saints, preluding, as it did, his early death in the Crusades, and the deep sanctity of her widowhood, the poetical and familiar traits of the mutual affection of the young betrothed couple, the touching fidelity of his love for her, and her tender and grateful devotion to him, selected and traced, as they are, by a master's hand, formed a picture which laid hold, as it were, of Rose's heart, and seemed to call forth all its latent powers of thought and feeling. Seeds sown in her soul during the early years she had spent under her Aunt Médé's roof had been lying dormant ready to expand under the ripening effects of suffering, and now they were about to bear fruit. As Rose perused those eloquent pages she traced the impression they had made on another mind; pencil marks, and a few words here and there, revealed to her what had been George's thoughts as he read them. This agreement, this sympathy between them, struck her with a mournful sense of what might once have been, and now might never be. When he had felt the full force of some passage descriptive of Christian wedded love, or of exalted virtue, she had, no doubt, risen before his

mind as the childish, frivolous school-girl she must have seemed to him, and the image of Denise de la Pinéde passed before his eyes as the living type of womanly perfection. "Yes," she mentally exclaimed, "I can feel for him, I can pity him now, I can understand what his aversion must be to the worldly, selfish girl he thinks he has married. What a strange fate ours has been! But there must be a meaning in it, God never does anything or permits anything without a purpose, I have often heard Aunt Médé say so. She would have gone out of her mind, she said, during the Reign of Terror, but for that thought. I will go to her, or rather, I will write and ask her to come to me. I cannot leave this place, George might come back any day. Oh, that would be too good to be true. If I saw him coming in at that gate, what should I do? Perhaps be again afraid of showing him that I love him. And is it possible? Do I really love him, now that he hates me?"

As she was asking herself this question, Zon knocked at the door, and on being told to come in, the aged hand-maid appeared, and giving a contemptuous look at the books scattered on the floor, exclaimed, "Good gracious, Misé Rose, what are you doing here, sitting in the middle of all these dusty books? and reading by candlelight, too. I declare it is enough to put your eyes out.

Dear me! Have you not learnt enough during the eight years you spent at school, that you must be poring over books now that you are grown up?"

"It is to amuse myself that I read, Zon."

"Ah, well, I should think you did want amusement; but you might find something better to do than that."

"What would you have me do?"

"Why, go to town, of course, and pay visits. You have never put on one of your best gowns."

"I cannot go and visit about during my husband's absence."

"Ah, indeed; well, if I was Madame——"

Zon did not venture to express her thoughts in words, but an expressive shrug of her shoulders was significant enough of the very low estimation in which she held her young mistress' husband.

"Well," she said, "if Madame won't go into town, why does not she invite her friends here?"

"I do not want to see anybody for some days."

"People must please themselves, I suppose," Zon rejoined in a tone of resignation, "but if you lead this sort of life much longer, I expect that you will go into a decline. I don't know but that it would be my duty to tell my mistress what I think of it, but if I go to town, who would cook Madame's dinner?"

"I forbid you, Zon, to say anything about me

to my mother. In a few days I shall go and see her myself. In the mean time, dear old Zon, do not meddle with what concerns no one but myself."

Rose went into her bed-room, taking with her the book which had made so deep an impression on her mind, and one or two more in which she had seen pencil marks and annotations in George's hand, and others on the blank leaves of which were written some unfinished poems, which she read with a beating heart, for they let her into the secrets of his soul. They contained allusions which marked them as his own, and now that she knew, by Aloys de Belmont's letter, that he was a poet, she valued every word, every line, which gave her an insight into his character—a glimpse of his mind.

That night worked a great change in Rose. During the next three days, spent almost entirely alone, many things came back to her recollection which she had heard but scarcely noticed at the time, whether in conversations with her Aunt Médé or from a nun at her school, who happened to be one of those obscure saints who unconsciously sow seed which, though it often falls on the wayside or is choked by thorns, sometimes does bear unexpected fruit. It was a strange transformation that took place in the soul, the mind, and the heart of the thoughtless school-girl, the wedded maiden, the

notary's uninteresting daughter, such as she appeared to the family at La Pinéde. It seemed to her as if for the first time she really thought, read, and prayed. Feelings of strong religious fervour had been awakened in her, and at the same time a pure though earthly affection was dawning in her heart. She had discovered in the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary that these two feelings are not incompatible. A strange new happiness seemed filling her soul which the foresight of suffering did not interfere with. Hers might be a sad fate in the eyes of the world. It might be God's will that the cloud which hung over her future life was never to be dissipated, that he whom she now felt she could have dearly loved, might never care for her, never return to her, but she now discerned something higher and greater than earthly love, than earthly happiness. That light which sometimes breaks slowly on the mind after long years, sometimes after a life-time of conflict and trial, illuminates others at once, in the morning of their days not always permanently or consistently, but it shines on the mountain-tops, even whilst the upward path is encompassed by dark shades. Such was the case in this instance. The clue had been laid hold of, and clutched by that young hand, which erewhile was helplessly stretched out in the midst of unfathomable gloom. The hour when we can

look forward to a life of suffering, of solitude, or of sacrifice, with a thrill of supernatural joy, is often the turning-point in our lives.

When three days afterwards Rose ran out to meet her Aunt Médé, whom she had urgently invited to come and see her, the penetrating eyes of the old lady perceived that a change had come over her darling niece. The soft, smiling, childish face was paler than she had ever seen it, the dark blue eyes had an earnest look such as she had never observed in them before. Even in the sound of her voice there was something different from its usual tone. At first they spoke of indifferent things as people do who are longing and yet afraid to begin an important conversation, and then Rose took her aunt upstairs to the room next her own which she had prepared for her, and made her sit down in an arm-chair near the open window, and as she used to do in her childhood, placed herself on a stool at her feet, her sweet face looking up into that kind aged face which looked down upon her so calmly and so wistfully. Misé Médé longed to ask, "Are you happy, my darling?" but she did not feel confidence enough that the question could be answered affirmatively, to do so.

"I suppose your husband is taking one of those long walks," she said, "which you wrote to me he liked so much. Will he come home for dinner?

I want to make real acquaintance with my nephew."

Two large tears rolled down Rose's cheeks, and a sudden flush gave them a deep colour. "Aunt Médé, I have so much to tell you, so much to ask you. My mind is full of new thoughts, and such strange different feelings, I hardly know how to begin telling you what has happened——"

"Happened, my child? What can have happened to you?"

"George has left me."

"Left you? Good heavens, Rose, what do you mean? When? How?"

"Four days ago."

"And where has he gone?"

"To Marseilles."

"With whom?"

"I am not quite sure; but I think he is staying with a friend of his, a M. de Belmont."

"My dear child, you should not have suffered him to leave you," Misé Médé said, with a look of uneasiness. "Who knows if he is capable of taking care of himself?"

"Oh! Aunt Médé," Rose exclaimed, "you, and all of us, and his own family, have made a great mistake about George—an extraordinary mistake—which I have found out too late. Oh, yes! too late!" And Rose hid her face on her aunt's knees.

"Speak, my child, you frighten me. Is he quite out of his mind?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Médé, he is not a bit out of his mind. He is full of goodness and cleverness. He is one whom a woman could both love and admire. And if, on the day we were married, I had not shown that I hated and despised him—it was before you came back and talked to me, Aunt Médé—I might have been the happiest of wives, but now it is all over with that kind of happiness."

She paused, but seeing her old aunt's intense anxiety, she went on—

"As soon as we arrived here he gave me this letter."

She placed it in Mademoiselle Lescalle's hands, and when she had read it, said—

"He has acted up to what he wrote. For form's sake he remained here till last Monday, but we hardly spoke to one another, and then I think it was because he saw me looking so unhappy, and thought I could not bear the sight of him, that he went away, and I shall never see him again."

"That does not follow," Aunt Médé said, and seemed for a few moments buried in thought. "But what besides this letter—which is indeed a proof that he is far from being the sort of person we supposed—has made you think him clever, as you say you did not speak together hardly at all?"

Then Rose, in an artless and touching manner, told Misé Médé of George's conversations with Benôite, related to her by the little shepherdess, of the verses she had seen him write, and those she had found in his books; of the portrait he had drawn of Mdlle. de la Pinéde, and his romantic devotion to her. And then, word for word, she repeated what Toinette had told her of his visits and their conversations, and last—not least—of M. de Belmont's letter, which had thrown light on the strange and fatal mistake of those who had mistaken the languor of an overwrought brain, and the fanciful peculiarities of a poetic nature, for proofs of mental deficiency and disordered understanding.

"I see it all," Mdlle. Lescalle slowly ejaculated. "It may all come right, Rosy; but oh, my darling, if you knew how my old heart aches at the thought of what you have had to suffer, and may still suffer, my own poor darling child!" Then Misé Médé's self-command gave way, and tears coursed down her wrinkled cheeks. Rose took her hands in hers, and, looking at her earnestly, said—

"Aunt Médé, don't cry. You will not grieve when I have told you all I feel and think. When we both supposed on my wedding-day, that I was bound for life to a *fada*, though we tried to make the best of it, that was a sorrow which had something of shame in it, and then, though I wished to be

good, I had no idea, I did not understand, what you must know so well, Aunt Médé—that there is a way of being good, which is not the common way, and that in it suffering and joy can be strangely blended——"

Rose stopped, overcome by her feelings, and looked up at the sky with an expression in her face which revealed to Aunt Médé the work of Divine grace which had taken place in that young soul. She slowly took up the words Rose had uttered, and said—

"So strangely blended, my child, that a heart broken with the deepest human sorrow may still know a happiness which is indeed a foretaste of heaven. But tell me how you have learnt this blessed secret? By what means have you discovered it?"

"Toinette's words, and what she said of all George had done for her, first gave me an idea that one might be very unhappy oneself and yet find happiness in loving God and doing good to others. But what explained it to me was this book."

She had brought with her St. Elizabeth's life, and laid it on the knees of her aunt, whose eyes glistened when she saw it.

"Ah! my child; you understood as you read these pages—they are very familiar to me, Rosy—for the first time you understood what it is to be a

saint?" Rose nodded assent. "And then came the thought that to aim at sanctity, and by dint of sufferings and sacrifices to climb the steep ascent which leads to it, might be a greater, deeper joy than any this world can give." Rose again bowed her head and remained a moment silent. Then she said—

"Aunt Médé, if you knew to what a degree I feel this! I see two paths before me. I have no clear idea which God means me to follow. I leave that to Him;" and again Rose looked upward, and joined together her hands, which rested on Aunt Médé's knees. "What I mean is, that I see two kinds of life which He may intend for me."

"Tell me what you are thinking of, my child."

"Well, Aunt Médé, it is possible, is it not, that George may return, and that he may some day find out that he can love me, as I have found out that I can love him, and then that we might be happy together, and love God and serve Him together, like the good Duke Louis and the dear St. Elizabeth? But if he does not come back, and if he never cares for me at all, then my life would be like hers after her husband's death. I would live with you, dearest Aunt Médé, or here perhaps, if my parents would let me remain here amidst these beautiful mountains, and the poor people scattered about this place, nursing the sick, teaching the children, and praying in the village churches. I

did not know till quite lately, till these few last days, what prayer meant. I used to say my prayers, and I knew our Lord was in the tabernacle on the altar, but not as I now know and feel it. Oh, what a wonderful change comes over one when this is once realized! Which of these two kinds of lives would be best, do you think, Aunt Médé?"

"In themselves, my child, and for those bound by no duty and no indissoluble tie, a life devoted to God and to the poor is, without doubt, the most easy and straight road to heaven. If yours is to prove an exceptional fate, if though married you are irretrievably separated from him whose name you bear, then you may believe that what God will have permitted is intended to be the means of raising you to a more than ordinary perfection. But remember, my child, that yours is not a case in which you can be allowed to choose between these two kinds of lives. There is no choice for you in the matter."

"Perhaps not, Aunt Médé; still it might depend a little on what I felt and did."

"What you must feel and what you must do, Rose, is not optional. The vow you pronounced at the altar, the union which received the blessing of the Church, is not cancelled by what has since occurred. You have a responsibility with regard to the soul of your husband, from which nothing

can relieve you. You must not acquiesce in his forsaking you, even in order to lead a life of what seems to you higher perfection. The most perfect life for Christians is that in which God has placed them, and your duty is clear and evident."

"Is it? I have felt, on the contrary, so perplexed how to act."

"How to act may be a question, but the intention of your acts should not be doubtful. You must leave nothing undone to undeceive your husband as to your feelings towards him. You must let him know that you can, that you do, love him——"

"Let a man who hates me know that I care for him; and that, after he has made it plain that he despises me?"

"Is it the Rose who has been opening her heart to me that he despises? Does he know her? Has he had any opportunity of reading into her soul? But even if he had, if he had consciously and deliberately rejected the wife God has given him, it would still be your duty patiently, sweetly, unweariedly, to pray, to strive, to long for his return, never to give up the hope of it, and whilst rising daily higher in the upward path to which God's grace is calling you, to hold out to him the hand which was given him on your marriage-day, and trust to the end that your strong and patient

love—the love of a Christian wife, not the fondness of a frivolous woman—will at last recall him to your side, and draw him to God."

"From the notes in his books, and his verses, Aunt Médé, I should think George was more religious than I am."

"It may be so, my child. We cannot judge of others in that respect, even when well acquainted with them, and I do not know your husband at all; but I do not reckon religious poetical effusions as any proof of a real and firm faith. Those who have read Victor Hugo and Lamartine's verses in their early days, know in what admirable language pious emotions can be poured forth, and yet how little real religion may inspire them."

"Oh, Aunt Médé, I have seen some of their writings amongst George's books, and found beautiful things in them, but they did not help me as I now want to be helped. It was like drinking wine too strong for my head, or smelling a too powerful perfume. When I read *this* book, I feel as if I was breathing mountain air."

"Feed on that kind of air, Rosy," Mdlle. Lescalle said, with a smile. "Brace yourself with it in preparation for whatever God may appoint to your lot. I begin to think that my Rose, the child of my heart, is going to be one of those valiant women whom the Scriptures speak of, and I do not

give up the hope of a little earthly happiness for her either, if she will be brave and patient. We need not despair at all that everything will come right. You and your husband are very young, two children in fact, who have been mismanaged by others, and then, left to yourselves, mismanaged one another. We must see now what is best to be done. You must let me think and pray about it. An hour or two on my knees will help me to a good thought."

Rose threw her arms round her old aunt's neck, and kissed her as she used to do in her childhood, when Misé Médé made everything straight for her.

"I will leave you alone for a while," she said, almost gaily; "but don't pray too long, Aunt Médé, for now I have begun I want to tell you much more about what I think, and wish, and mean to do, whether——" She stopped. It was easy to read the thoughts that were passing through her mind, and the connection between those words and the next she uttered. "Toinette, you know, said George was very good. It was he who made her forgive people and love God, and M. de Belmont wrote to him that why he liked him so much at college was because he was so kind to every one; and you know, Aunt Médé, that I think, I really do think, that in going away and leaving

me he thought he was doing right and what was best for me."

"Very likely he did, Rosy, and we must find out the best way of undeceiving him on that point. And now your cheeks are paler than I like to see them, my child; put on your hat and go and breathe some of that mountain air you are so fond of, amidst the wild thyme and Benôite's goats. No, don't take a book with you. Look at the sky and the flowers, gladden your heart with the thought of Him Who made them and you, and leave the future in His hands."

"Yes, Aunt Médé; and the road up the hill leads to Toinette's cabin. I will pay her a visit."

A moment afterwards Mdlle. Lescalle saw, from her window, Rose crossing the garden carrying a basket on her arm, and singing George's hymn to St. Elizabeth. She watched her graceful form, her light step, and listened to the sweet young voice carolling away as she disappeared amongst the trees, with a grateful sense that, come what might, the child of her heart had discovered the road to true happiness.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN EMERGENCY.

THE result of Misé Médé's thoughts and prayers was, that she wrote that evening a long letter to a dear friend of hers at Marseilles, one of those women whom people instinctively turn to when a difficult thing has to be done, or a great act of kindness to be performed. One of those energetic, large-hearted French souls, who carry everything before them, and work wonders with a marvellous ease and singular simplicity. Later on, Mdlle. Amélie Lautard was decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honour. So great and obvious was her influence for good over the soldiers at Marseilles, amongst whom she indefatigably laboured, that in consideration of her services, the Minister of War, under the Empire, granted her the privilege of shortening, at her discretion, in certain cases, the term of military punishment.

But at the time we are writing of, this holy woman's career of charitable work was at its outset.

Her father had been intimately acquainted with Mdlle. Lescalle, and she had always remained in correspondence with the little Amélie she had known and loved as a child. After many anxious reflections, she determined to tell her the whole story of Rose's marriage and of George's unrequited attachment to Mdlle. de la Pinéde, now Sœur Denise at the House of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. She knew, through Mdlle. Lautard, that this young girl had been staying a short time before at the Chateau de la Pinéde, and that she had felt interested in George de Védelles, whose isolation in the midst of his family and deep melancholy had painfully struck her. She thought that Mdlle. Lautard might sound Sœur Denise on the subject, and gain from her some information as to his character and state of mind, which would furnish a clue to the most effectual means of bringing about his return to his wife and a good understanding between them. Misé Médé was much puzzled herself as to the real truth about George. On the one hand, she had heard it positively stated that his intellect was weak and his character childish. It seemed strange that his own parents, his clever father and his loving mother, should have been deceived on that point, and though all that Rose had related and shown to her militated strongly against these pre-

conceived impressions, it had not quite destroyed them. Then Théréson also had burst into the room where Mdlle. Lescalle was meditating on these conflicting accounts, and, finding at last a vent for the ire which had been accumulating in her soul during the last weeks, poured forth unmitigated expressions of indignation against M. le Baron, whom she described as a sort of savage idiot, whom it would be well if Misé Rose had never seen, far less married, and who would have deserved to have had Benôite for his wife. They would have been a well-matched pair. She with her foolish gibberish and wild-cat ways, and he with his rude, gloomy, and silent manner.

In vain did Mdlle. Lescalle try to check this torrent of abuse. She could understand that under the circumstances Zon might be justified in her aversion to George, and some of the things she said made some impression on her own mind. The doubt was, whether with some amount of apparent ability when he held a pen in his hand, he was not incapable of acting rationally, or even taking care of himself, in which case it would be necessary to communicate with his parents and with Rose's father and mother, at the risk of estranging him for ever from her, or, on the other hand, of trying other means of bringing them together, removing misconceptions, and appealing to his sense of honour

and duty. She came to the conclusion that this ought to be attempted if possible, and that Mdlle. Lautard might not only consult Sœur Denise, but seek out also M. de Belmont, with whom she hoped George was still residing, and find out from him the real truth about his college friend.

Such was the purport of the letter she wrote and sent that evening. During the following days she devoted herself, with the tact and ability which belonged to her character, to keep Rose's mind occupied with cheering and strengthening thoughts, to excite her to hope, and yet to prepare her for disappointment. They prayed and they read together, visited Toinette, and found out other poor people in the neighbourhood, sadly in want both of a little help and of moral and religious instruction. A new world, that of practical charity, seemed opening to the young girl, who had so rapidly grown from a child into a woman. It was a singular blessing for her during those days of uncertainty, that she was experiencing those first fervours of awakened faith in and love of God, which fill the soul with a strange sweetness and almost lift it above earthly cares and joys, and that she was guided at that time by one so clear-sighted and thoroughly sensible as Misé Médé. The thought had crossed her mind that her niece might, like herself, perhaps be called to a life of entire

consecration to God, and the full practice of the evangelical counsels. She remembered how, when she was Rose's age, and the world was smiling upon her and life looking very bright and fair, a cloud, small at first, like a man's hand, had appeared in the horizon in the shape of the first news and rumours of revolutionary disturbances in the neighbourhood. The great events which had convulsed her country seemed at first to have little to do with the prospects and the destiny of a young girl in the middling ranks of life, but the storm went on disturbing and at last darkening every part of France and bringing the scaffold within sight of the humble homes of the *bourgeoisie* as well as the nobility. Then war to religion was declared, that war to the knife, which rouses the soul to sacrifice, to action, to heroism, and then Mdlle. Lescalle understood what God's voice was saying to her heart, she understood what was her vocation, not the peaceful cloister—convents were everywhere closed and communities dispersed, but the religious life in her own threatened home, the religious life in its essence, the religious vows, in its work amongst the poor, the prisoners, the dying, at the foot of the scaffold, in the cell of the condemned, in the caves and garrets where Mass was said in secret, in the perilous services rendered to a faithful outlawed priesthood.

She embraced this life with unflinching zeal.

She thanked God that He had cast her lot in those dark days. She met dangers which brought her within an inch of death, and often felt that nothing less than the complete consecration which severs at one stroke the heart from all merely human joys could have borne her unscathed through the fiery furnace of that terrible time. And now she asked herself, "Was it God's will that Rose should walk in her steps? Had He assigned to her a peculiar destiny, in order that bearing the name of a wife, she should be, as she herself had been, a religious in life and heart? Was that her vocation, strangely brought about, strangely accomplished?" She watched her without seeming to do so. She sounded her heart as they sat conversing under the pines, or strolling along the mountain paths. She observed the changes of her countenance, and noticed little acts which would have escaped a less penetrating and loving eye, and soon made up her mind that whether her husband returned to her or not, Rose was not called to tread the path she herself had trodden, not even amidst calmer scenes and brighter days.

Many little indications showed her that her heart was not free, that not only had she discovered that George de Védelles was one a woman could love, but that she had fallen in love with him since the day she had with such terrible reluctance become

his wife, and he had rejected her. If for a little while they spoke of anything else, she would always revert to something relating to him, to his books, his verses, his drawings, the remarks she had heard him make on the surrounding scenery, or to the Sisters of Charity, and Sœur de la Pinéde, and Valsec, his parents, and his friends, Benôite and Toinette.

She saw her kneeling before the tabernacle praying with intense fervour, her eyes filling with tears, and her little hands clasped together. When she came out of the church there was a sweet and peaceful expression in her face, but Aunt Médé noticed that she went and sat on a bench from whence the road could be farthest seen, and gazed wistfully upon it. When in the house, if the gate was heard to open, her eyes turned towards it with a rapid glance.

Then, again, Mdlle. de la Pinéde's picture was placed in Rose's own room. With some women, perhaps, this would have seemed a proof rather of indifference than of love, but Misé Médé knew her niece's humble, tender, affectionate character, and felt certain that it would be free from jealousy and lovingly attracted by all that one she loved cared for. "It cannot but come right," she said to herself, and almost as impatiently as Rose looked for the postman's arrival on the day she expected an answer from Marseilles.

When the postman, two days afterwards, called at Belbousquet he had only one letter to leave, and it was not addressed to Mdlle. Lescalle, but to the Baronne George de Védelles. Rose was sitting at breakfast opposite to Aunt Médé when Zon laid it on the table. She turned red and then pale, and her hands trembled so much, that she could hardly unseal the envelope. Mdlle. Lescalle watched her with anxiety, and felt the news was bad before Rose had finished reading the letter, which she handed to her in silence. This was what George had written.

My dear Rose,—It will hardly surprise you to hear that I am about to embark with my friend, M. de Belmont, on board his uncle's ship which is going to cruise for two years amongst the South Sea Islands. I have written to my brother to request him to break this to my mother and announce it to my father. As I am of age, I have a right to act on my own judgment, and I am persuaded that for them, for you, and for myself, I am doing what is best and wisest.

I have been for some years a source of sorrow and anxiety to my parents, and often a cause of dissension between them. Jacques will certainly be elected deputy I hear, thanks to your father's exertions, and, in his new position and interests, they will find a compensation for my absence, if, indeed, any is needed.

As to you, poor child, on whom was thrust the saddest of all destinies, a union with one whom you could not look on without detestation, I hope that life will still have some charms, though I admit that your fate is a melancholy one. I have begged my father and my brother to arrange with your parents all that regards my fortune, which I wish to leave entirely to you, with

the exception of a small annuity, which will suffice for my wants and tastes.

We sail on Saturday morning, and in taking leave of France and all I have ever known or cared for, my chief hope and prayer are that you, whose existence I have involuntarily blighted, may still enjoy peaceful and happy days. If I was an infidel, or a philosopher of the school of our modern novelists, I would gladly put myself altogether out of your way. But as I am a Christian, though a very imperfect one, we must each bear our separate burthens, and drag on life as best we may.

May God bless you, Rose.

Sincerely yours,
GEORGE DE VÉDELLES.

Aunt Médé pushed her spectacles off her nose when she had read this letter, and ejaculated, "Foolish boy." Rose snatched it from her and said, "No, not foolish, Aunt Médé. It is a very generous and kind letter, only—only it breaks my heart."

"There is no need at all for any heart-breaking, silly child. Even if we cannot stop the departure of M. le Baron, and if he was to remain two years in the South Seas, that would not be the world's end, nor your life's end either. You are, let me see, not much more than seventeen. Dear me! perhaps that is the best thing he could have done. He may come back before you are twenty, and you will both be wiser then."

"Two years, Aunt Médé, two years would be like two centuries. O dear Aunt Médé, can't we

stop him? You see that he is going away because he thinks I hate him, and if he was to be shipwrecked and drowned, or cast on a desert island like Robinson Crusoe, I should never forgive myself."

"Well, child, I suppose the only thing to be done is to go to Marseilles and to call on Mdlle. Lautard, who has the wisest head on her shoulders of any woman I know, and if your husband has not yet sailed, to see if, between her and your Aunt Médé, some means to stop him may be devised. You and I, Rose, will find ourselves rather in a scrape, if M. George makes this *coup de tête*, and we have told neither his parents nor yours of his having left you some days ago. You see, my little girl, I was afraid of their falling out. Your father and mother, I mean, and the Count and Countess, or of their all mismanaging him."

"They would have been sure to do so, Aunt Médé, that would have been the worst thing that could happen to us. Now there is hope if only he has not sailed. Let us lose no time. May I tell Simon to fetch two mules to take us to Cassio, where we shall meet the Marseilles diligence? If he will but make haste, they will be here in an hour."

"Very well," Misé Médé said; and at the end of two hours—for Rose had miscalculated the

capabilities of old Simon's legs—the mules stood at the door, with their jingling bells and large, wide saddles, ornamented with red tassels, and Dominique, the driver, stood alongside of them, a tall, tanned, fierce-looking man, with a brown complexion and tangled black hair.

Rose had known him from her childhood, and was consequently on familiar terms with him.

"Make haste, Dominique," she exclaimed; "we must be at Marseilles before dinner-time."

"You will be at Cassio, Misé Rose, in three hours; that I undertake. As to Marseilles, it is no business of mine."

"Are you going to walk all the way to Cassio?"

"Of course; my legs are, if anything, stronger than theirs," he added, patting affectionately the mules, which had certainly worked hard in their day. Then he hoisted Rose's little figure on her saddle as lightly as if she had been a bird, his dark complexion and wild attire contrasting with her delicate features and peach-like colouring in a way which would have delighted a painter.

Old Simon the while was helping Misé Médé to climb up to the back of the other mule, and they then set out at a kind of trot, Dominique keeping up with them at a pace between a walk and a run. Rose felt as though she would have wished for wings, to bear her more rapidly to

Marseillès, and Misé Médé was obliged now and then to remind her that her old limbs could not stand this unmitigated speed.

As the little party was leaving the lane which led from Belbousquet into the path across the hills to Cassio, they met a peasant, who stopped Rose's mule, and said: "Madame, are you Madame de Védelles? I am one of the gardeners at La Pinéde."

"Yes. What do you want with me?"

"I have come to let M. George know—M. le Baron George, I mean—that M. Vincent, poor old gentleman, was seized last night with an attack of paralysis, and M. le Docteur says he has not long to live. He is quite conscious, poor dear man, but can speak very little. He keeps asking for M. George, and it is piteous to see him watching the door, and with the one hand he can move making the sign of the Cross, and throwing up his eyes to heaven. M. le Curé has been to see him, but he will not hear of being anointed till he has seen M. George, so I have come to fetch him: M. le Curé sent me. The girl who was sick went home last week; her room has been stripped and purified. M. le Curé told me to say that there was no danger, and he wishes M. George to come without delay, for the old man may die any moment. He is conscious in a sort of way, but not quite reasonable like, and it's no use preaching to him whilst he

frets about seeing M. George. M. and Madame and M. Jacques are perhaps coming home to-morrow, but by that time, 'tis ten to one, M. Vincent will be dead."

"Oh, Aunt Médé," Rose exclaimed, "I am so sorry! I know George loves very much that old man. There is something so pretty he wrote about him on one of those scraps of paper I picked up in his room. It began 'Old Vincent, thou alone hast known.' How sad if he dies without seeing him again, and all the family with whom he has lived fifty years away."

Misé Médé fixed her eyes on Rose, those earnest, powerful eyes, which seemed to speak her thought.

"Come, my child: what are you going to do?" Mdlle. Lescalle asked; and anxiously waited the answer.

"Do you think, Aunt Médé, I might go to La Pinéde with this good man who has brought the message, and will you go on to Marseillès with Dominique?"

"By all means," Misé Médé replied. "It was what I wanted you to do, Rosette. Here, Dominique, give Madame de Védelles her bag; she is going the other way."

Rose had jumped off her saddle, and coming close to Misé Médé's mule, she threw her arms

round her, looked up in her face, and said: "Kiss me, Aunt Médé."

"God bless you, my darling," the old lady said, bending down her venerable face to press her lips on Rose's white forehead. "Go, and do your best with that poor old faithful servant, and tell him that he must think of God first, and of his young master afterwards. Get him to receive the last sacraments, and who knows what may follow? Yes, yes, little woman, I know the meaning of that beseeching look. Rely on your old Aunt Médé. What can be done, will be done; but remember Who it is that holds the reins aloft, and knows better than we do every turning of life's road. What He does is well done, Rosy; so be off, my brave child, and do your duty. Many a more dreary ride have I taken than this one of thine—in old days, when life and death were at stake. Say your beads as you jog on, and hope for the best."

A fond embrace was given, and the old woman and the young one parted, and went on their way, each with a holy purpose, each with a silent prayer.

When some hours afterwards Mdlle. Lescalle arrived at Marseilles, she went straight from the diligence to Mdlle. Lautard's house, but found her out. What next was to be done? It was quite uncertain when she would come home. There seemed nothing to do but wait. Waiting is hard

at such moments, and she determined to try and find George de Védelles. As Mdlle. Lautard's servants did not know where M. de Belmont lived, Misé Médé walked to the Admiralty, and there obtained his direction. Off she went to the house, the address of which had been given her, and rung the bell. She did not ask herself what she should say to George de Védelles if she should find him at home. She thought that the promise made to God's servants, that He will put into their mouths the words they should speak when they appear before kings to bear witness to the truth, in a certain degree applies to all who plead the cause of right against wrong, of justice against injustice, even in the secret struggles of domestic life, and the obscure trials of individual souls. She could form no plan, she could find no words which might not prove entirely misplaced according to the nature and state of mind of one she knew so little of as this strange young man, who had inspired once such aversion to the wife upon whom he had been forced, but for whom she now felt so evident an affection that if he did not return to her the bloom of her young life would vanish.

The bell was at last answered. M. de Belmont had left two days before, and gone on board his uncle's ship, which was to set sail that evening. Misé Médé's heart beat very fast.

"And the Baron George de Védelles, is he at home?" she asked, with intense anxiety.

"No, madame; he is also on board the *Jean Bart*, that is to say, he slept there last night. He called here for his letters two hours ago. M. le Baron embarks to-night with M. le Comte de Belmont."

"How soon do you suppose will the ship sail?" Mdlle. Lescalle asked.

"I cannot tell exactly, madame; but I suppose towards sunset."

"How long would it take to get to it?"

"I cannot tell, madame; it lies at some distance in the bay. Dear me, M. le Comte's own servant was here just now. He would have known; but the sailors at the port, not far off, would be able to inform madame."

Misé Médé returned to Mdlle. Lautard's house, and there heard that she would perhaps find her at the Military Hospital, where there was much sickness just then—she helped the sisters of Charity to nurse the soldiers.

These words made the thought flash through her mind that Denise—Sœur Denise—might be found there also, and thither she hurried with a speed wonderful at her age. Again, there was a weary time spent in the waiting-room, after sending a message to Mdlle. Lautard to say that she was

there, and wished to see her on pressing business. At last she came, that good, brave woman, with her bright, fine face, her slightly hump-backed figure, so well known in Marseilles, and her cheering smile.

"My dear, dear old friend, is it you? I wrote to you yesterday that I had discovered M. de Belmont's address, and would try and see him on your business as soon as I could. Has anything happened since you wrote?"

"Yes, my good Amélie, a letter from George de Védelles came, announcing his immediate departure. He leaves Marseilles this evening with M. de Belmont in the *Jean Bart.*"

"You take my breath away, my dear; but tell me quick, you still want to stop him?"

"Yes; for all sorts of reasons. It is a simple misunderstanding between those poor children—both so young, both so unfairly dealt with, and a poor old servant at La Pinéde is also dying, and sending for his young master. Rose is gone there. My dear Amélie, all might still come right if we could stop him. But how to write a message, how to write a letter which would have that effect, and every moment is precious."

"Let us call Sœur Denise: she knows him, and we don't. I said something about him to her the other day. She told me that he is rather a strange youth, but with a great deal that is good

in him, and cleverness too, she thinks, which none of his family seemed to suspect. Stop a minute, I will ask her to come and speak to you."

In a few minutes Sœur Denise came in with Mdlle. Lautard. Misé Médé, as she looked at the beautiful face under the white *cornette*, that face George de Védelles had depicted with marvellous talent, said to herself, "No wonder he cared for her," and there was a twinge in her heart as she thought that even her own dear, pretty, little Rose's loveliness could not stand a comparison with the matchless face, the lovely figure, the commanding and, at the same time, most gentle beauty of that daughter of St. Vincent de Paul, that humble servant of the poor.

Seated between Misé Médé and Mdlle. Lautard, Sœur Denise listened like a compassionating angel to the story, briefly told, of those two young creatures whose fate was concerned in Misé Médé's present efforts, and when the latter ejaculated, "How to explain in a few words the whole of this strange case! How to indicate it in a way that would stop him just as the anchor is about to weigh, and he fancies he is doing right to go!"

"Would the news of the old servant's danger prevail upon him?" Sœur Denise asked.

"It might, or it might not; he might even suspect a trick to prevent his departure."

Sœur Denise leant her brow on her hands, and thought a little; then she looked up with her bright, serious smile, and said: "What a blessing it is to have given up the world! A Sister of Charity can do what a young lady could not have done. Wait a minute, I must have one word with *ma sœur*, and then perhaps we may be able to stop this foolish departure."

She left the room, and soon returned with a letter in her hand, which she placed in Misé Médé's hands. It contained these words:

M. le Baron,—Your old servant Vincent is dangerously ill, and asks for you. Give up your voyage and go to him. You promised me that if I came to the Chapel of La Pinéde on the last day of May, you would grant any request of mine, whatever it might be. I was there, and I now claim your promise.

DENISE DE LA PINÉDE,
Fille de Charité.

Hôpital Militaire.

"God bless you, Sœur Denise," Misé Médé exclaimed, "but let me just tell you that I am afraid of his going straight to La Pinéde, and finding Rose, without having heard anything to enlighten him as to her present feelings towards him."

Sœur Denise took up a pen, and added this postscript: "Come first to the Hospital. There are important reasons for this."

"Will you speak to him, Sœur Denise? Will

you be the angel of peace that will reconcile him to his young wife? He never could resist you, I feel sure of that."

"I am not going to be an angel at all in the matter," Sœur Denise answered, with that playful simplicity so common amongst the Sisters of Charity. "If *ma sœur* approves of it, I have no objection to see the young Baron, and to give him a good scolding. Oh, here comes our messenger. Shall the note go as it is, Mdlle. Lescalle, or will you add anything to it?"

"Oh, no," both Misé Médé and Mdlle. Lautard exclaimed; and the missive was placed in the hands of a young sailor belonging to one of Sœur Denise's poor families, who promised not to lose a minute in conveying it to the gentleman on board the *Jean Bart.*

The bells of Notre Dame de la Garde were ringing the *Angelus,* the softened sound of their chimes floated in the transparent air as the setting sun was sinking into a bed of rosy-coloured clouds, leaving behind it that bright, lingering light, which is so striking on a summer's evening on the Mediterranean Sea.

George de Védelles was standing on the deck of the vessel, which in another hour was to weigh anchor. Sunk into a deep reverie, he was thinking at that moment of three persons, two of whom

would grieve at his departure, and one who would not know of it, or if she did, never give it a thought. There was his mother. He loved her very much. When she had been ill after her accident, his misery had shown him how strong was that love. But there had been a bitter feeling in his heart for many a long day, which had saddened his affection for her. She had been tender, very tender, to him, very gentle and kind; she had grieved at his father's harshness, and tried to make up for it; but she had not the least understood either his character, his state of health, or his sufferings of mind. Just as much as M. de Védelles and Jacques, she had looked upon him since his illness as a sort of grown-up child, or a nervous invalid, without energy or will or intellect. She had plotted with the others too to bring about his marriage, that marriage which had caused him such bitter humiliations. She had, indeed, had scruples on the subject, but they had been expressed too late to avail. But after resolving to abandon his home and the wife that had been forced upon him, and on whom he had been forced, now, at the last moment, the thought of his mother's sorrow haunted him. It had done so the whole of that day, but when in a *café*, where he had breakfasted, he had taken up the newspaper, and read the news of his brother's election as

Deputy des bouches du Rhone, his heart had hardened again for a while. They all had what they had striven for, and schemed for—Jacques his seat, his parents the full gratification of their pride in him, M. Lescalle a good settlement and the title of Baronne for his daughter. It was all as it should be, and no one had any right to complain.

"Poor old Vincent will be sorry," he thought. "Except my mother, he is the only creature in the world who really cares for me. I shall write to him from the first place we stop at." His eyes, which were wandering over the busy town he was about to leave, fixed themselves at that moment on a square ugly building which he knew well by sight, the Military Hospital. "Well, who knows but I may tread in her footsteps; who knows that I may not some day do as she is doing, live for God alone and the poor?"

It was not the first time that thought had struck him since he had left Belbousquet. The fact was that his conscience was not completely satisfied with his reasoning, and had now and then given signs of protesting, which it was necessary to lull, and the dream of a sublime vocation, to be hereafter followed, proved useful as an anodyne to troublesome doubts.

These deep musings were interrupted by M. de Belmont's voice, who cried to him from the

opposite side of the deck, "George, here is a sailor-boy who has brought a letter for you with 'immediate' written upon it."

The blood rushed to George's face and brow. He had no doubt some of his family, or his wife's relations, had written to stop his departure, and all the combativeness of his nature was roused. He felt almost inclined not to read the letter before the ship sailed. Then the fear that his mother might be ill crossed him. "I cannot run such a risk," he exclaimed, and he advanced to meet the boy, who held out the letter to him.

The instant he saw the handwriting his heart began to beat violently. When he had read the few lines addressed to him, he looked pale and agitated, but did not for a moment hesitate. Going straight up to M. de Belmont, he said, "Aloys, you will think me a very strange person, but I must go back. I cannot start with you. I have had bad news."

"Your parents?"

"No; our old servant Vincent is dangerously ill, and asks for me; I must be with him before he dies."

"Well, if it had been one of your family, my dear fellow—but really, I cannot see——. After you had made up your mind that you had such strong reasons for leaving France, it does seem rather changeable. I am afraid my uncle will be

annoyed. He did not want to take you. I had to argue, to urge, even to exaggerate the importance of your absenting yourself for some time, to induce him to consent, and now, half an hour before sailing——"

"I cannot help it, Aloys."

"Oh, of course, poets are endowed with wonderful sensibility, and are very wayward also; but I think this is really an exaggerated amount of feeling. If all you have tried to convince me of is the case—if you are determined not to return to your wife——"

"Quite as determined as ever——"

"Why, then, you are preparing for yourself and her all sorts of disagreeable scenes, which you so strongly argued you wished to avoid. Come, write a kind note to this poor old man, and do not in a moment give up what you took days to decide on."

"I cannot explain to you, Aloys, all the circumstances of the case. There is a promise in question, and I am bound in honour as well as in feeling to go this very moment on shore."

"Who sent this note?"

"A Sister of Charity," George replied, commanding his emotion. Turning to the young sailor, he said, "I will return with you in your boat. Aloys, let my portmanteau and bag be handed down. Good-bye, dear and kind friend;

do not judge me severely; I am not as wayward as you think."

"Well, stop a minute; I must give you, if you are really going, a letter I received just now from Paris. It contains some good news, enough to turn your head. Good heavens! there is the first signal given; we shall be off in a few minutes. God bless you, old fellow! Write to me."

In half an hour George de Védelles entered the waiting-room of the Military Hospital. It was full of people, and sisters in white *cornettes* flitted across it now and then, speaking now to one person and then to another. Some one came up to him and asked him whom he was waiting to see. He stammered out, "Sœur Denise." "She will be here in a moment," was the reply, and he sat down again with a strange sort of wonder that he was going to see Denise again, in such a new scene and under such different circumstances. Each *cornette* that appeared at the door he watched with anxiety. At last one did appear, and under it the beautiful face he had so worshipped. It was not changed—not at all changed, and yet it looked different, or else he looked upon it with different feelings. He was less agitated than before she had entered the room. He looked at her for some time previously to her seeing him.

She was leading by the hand two little children

who had been visiting their father, a sick soldier, and telling the person who had brought them to come again in a week's time. Then she turned to an old man, sitting with his chin resting on his stick, and joked and laughed with him till she made him look merry; and next she examined papers presented to her by a pale soldier with his arm in a sling, and gave him directions about the office where he was to apply for admission. Yes, she looked just as beautiful as ever; and each poor person who spoke to her seemed to hang on her words as if there had been in them a spell to bring them relief. It was delightful to watch her, as with a light step, a clear voice, and a pretty resolute manner, she got through her business with each of those who had asked for her. But as he watched and gazed, George felt that a change had come over Denise de la Pinéde, which unconsciously was changing also the feelings with which he looked upon her. The wild, the agitating, the sentimental worship with which he had regarded the girl, who like an angel of beauty and brightness had visited her ancestral home, and roused in him the first emotions of a romantic affection, seemed to disappear like magic in the presence of the earnest, business-like, serene, sweet-faced Sister of Charity. They melted away in the healthy sunshine of her joyous, placid countenance as the white frost

disappears from the pane where it had formed fanciful pictures. By this time she perceived him, and coming up to him with a smile, said :

"Oh, M. le Baron, I wanted to speak to you."

George felt quite calm and composed.

"You must excuse me," Sœur Denise said, "if I doubted for an instant that a dying person's wish to see you, and that person an old man who has loved you from a child, would be sufficient to decide you to give up your departure. Excuse me for having thought it necessary to claim the fulfilment of a rash promise, which you had probably by this time forgotten."

"I have forgotten nothing," George answered, "and I thank you for having made it impossible for me to hesitate between two duties which seemed equally imperative."

"That of consoling Vincent on his death-bed, and the other? What was that other duty, M. George?"

There was a sort of smile on Denise's face, a look of amusement in her dark, bright eyes, which piqued George, and he answered with a heightened colour :

"May I ask, ma sœur, if in writing to claim the fulfilment of my promise, and stopping my departure, you were actuated by the sole desire that I should visit poor Vincent on his death-bed?"

"No, M. le Baron, I wished also to save you from committing a wrong and a foolish action."

"What do you mean? How can you judge of my reasons? You do not even know what were my intentions."

"I know this much, that you are married to a virtuous and amiable girl, and that without her consent—without the knowledge of your parents, to whom you owe respect, if not obedience; you are acting on pure impulse, and abandoning your home, your wife, and your duties in a fit of anger or despondency."

There was something so severe in the expression of Sœur Denise's countenance, that George quailed beneath her glance. He had once looked upon her as an angel sent to console him when his mother's illness was breaking his heart. Now she seemed like a heavenly messenger commissioned to upbraid him. He felt half indignant, half subdued. His cheek was flushed and his brow contracted. He burst forth in a tone of voice as loud as was compatible with the fear of being heard by some of the groups scattered about the room, and began to justify himself. He spoke of having been forced to marry a girl he did not care for. Sœur Denise interrupted him and said:

"No force should have compelled you to do that, M. George; you are a perfectly truthful

person, and I am sure you will not venture to say that it was not optional for you to resist the pressure put upon you."

"My parents were bent on this marriage."

"If you were bound to obey them then, what right have you now to fly in their faces by forsaking the wife they have given you?"

"She hates me, and I can never love her."

"Are you sure she hates you? Have you tried to love her? Have you tried to make her love you? Have you forgot that you are bound to her by the vows you made before God's altar, and that you have no right to deal with her as with a stranger? M. le Baron, you are a man of honour; you would not have broken a promise you gave me, half in joke, perhaps, and you deliberately break one you made to protect and cherish this young girl whom God has committed to your keeping, and for whose soul you will have to answer, if, abandoned at the age of seventeen to all the temptations of youth and inexperience, she should stray from the path of virtue and honour. You have not thought of this; you have been deluding yourself; you have been on the point of committing a great sin. Thank God that He has saved you from it. Oh, M. de Védelles, how blind you have been! how nearly wicked without knowing it!"

"She hates me, and my wish was to deliver her

from the presence of one whom she looks upon with aversion."

Sœur Denise made a little gesture of impatience, and said:

"Because a child like your young wife turned her back upon you once and vexed you, are both your lives to be wretched? Do your duty: leave the rest to God. Would I had still, as some hours ago, the right to command you!"

"Sœur Denise," George exclaimed with emotion, "listen to me: I am not so bad as you think me. I really thought what I meant to do was best for Rose, and my plans were not selfish. I left her all the means of enjoyment I renounced, and my intention was to offer myself to work with the Catholic missionaries in the South Sea Islands, and lead, far away from Europe, the sort of life you are leading here."

Sœur Denise could not repress a smile.

"My dear M. de Védelles," she replied, "that was a very fine dream, but it is God alone Who can call people to lives of this sort, not their own deluded fancies. You have before you your path traced out. It may still be a happy one."

George shook his head.

"You can make it a happy one if you choose, even if it was full of trials and sorrows. But earthly happiness may still be yours, if you do not

thrust it from you. I have a great mind to tell you a secret, in two words, before I leave you. That little wife of yours—you know I have never told a lie in my life, even for a good object—I say, your wife loves you, and is breaking her heart at your leaving her. Good-bye, M. de Védelles! Give my kind regards to M. Vincent, and tell him that Sœur Denise will offer up her communion for him to-morrow."

As she passed through the passage into the wards, Sœur Denise met Mademoiselle Lescalle, who had been praying during the whole time of the interview. She took her by the hand and led her to the window. It was getting dark, but they could see George hurrying down the street leading to the Bureau des Diligences.

"There he goes," she whispered to Misé Médé.

"Does he know he will find Rose at La Pinéde?"

"No, I thought it better not to tell him so. I think all will be right; but now we must leave the rest to our good God, and hope for the best."

END OF VOL. I.

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